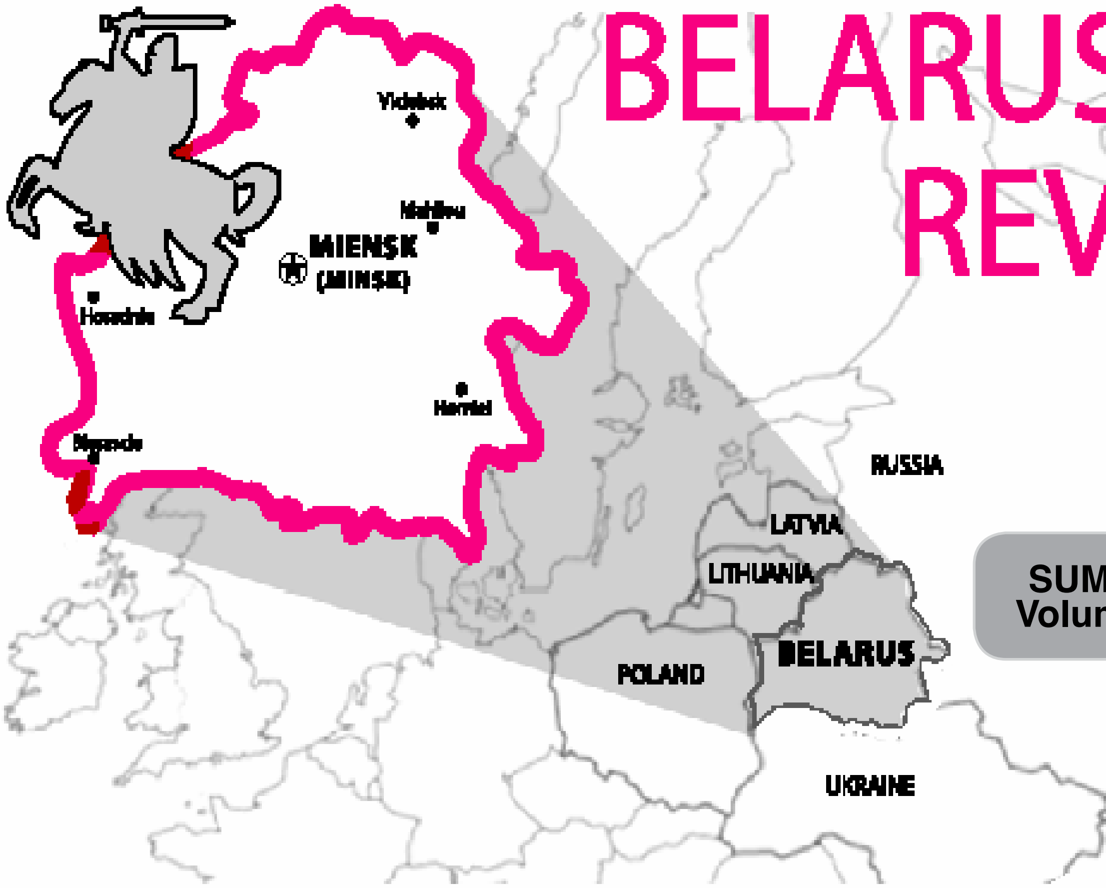
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In this issue

EDITORIAL

Brave Policy Thinking: The Time is Now

By Mikalaj Pačkajeŭ

The uneventfulness of the last several months could not have been but disappointing for anyone hoping to see the political prisoners in Belarus freed soon, and the current efforts to that end vindicated. A lack of closure to the post-December 2010 bout of political repressions means the pro-democratic community inside Belarus is still "bleeding", as some of its most prominent figures and activists remain in jail, while others have been effectively forced out of public life or have had to leave the country. This brings home the question whether the current scope of the EU and US measures – intended primarily to discourage Lukashenka from brutality against his political opponents – has been quite adequate for the purpose. However, if a positive side is to be found to an impasse, it should be precisely in motivating the policy planners to come up with new brave designs to start solving those problems that clearly won't just go away. An impasse should also encourage the policy-makers to contemplate raising the stakes, aiming to achieve a good and long-term solution. This would mean a bold vision of a future for Belarus: its transformation from the infamy of "the last dictatorship of Europe" into a central factor for a positive sea-change at the core of the East-European post-USSR region. Now is the time for the democratic international community to accumulate sufficient political will for new comprehensive policy measures to assist the pro-democratic community in Belarus to rescue the country from the clutches of tyranny, for the sake of Belarus as well as that of the whole region on the EU's eastern borders.

The *Rada* of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, as the Belarusian historical state institution in Exile, held its own discussions at its general session on June 1, 2013, in New York. For the *Rada*, its benchmark is based on principles of the 1918 Belarusian Democratic Republic: an independent democratic Belarus. But as history unfolds, the *Rada*'s responses to how it can best contribute to achieving these objectives require continuous fine-tuning. It is certain that democracy can only come to Belarus from within. On the other hand, there is a growing recognition that – following nearly two decades under Lukashenka's rule, and given the uncertainty about how exactly his regime will meet its end – the *Rada* might also be called to serve the democratic society in Belarus in roles other than those found just in the *Rada*'s recent exile history.

The state of democracy and human rights is by far the most widely-recognized of Belarus's problems. Less universally understood is the issue of how the state of democracy in Belarus was interlinked with Belarus being the Belarusian nation-state, and then how Lukashenka's policy of suppressing its "Belarusness" was instrumental in replacing a nascent democracy with his neo-Soviet regime of personal power. In this issue of the *BR* the readers will find a useful account of how it were the Belarusian national symbols and the status of the Belarusian language – and not e.g. the parliamentary prerogatives – that became Lukashenka's first target for assault in 1995. That also signified his leadership's first major break with the constitutional legitimacy of Belarus, as well as its first exercise in conducting heavily controlled referendums.

The announcement of plans for a Russian fighter-bomber airbase in Belarus is a new concern. Conceding a significant share of control over the Belarusian national security directly to Russia should appear problematic for Lukashenka himself. If Russia was to gain such a military asset in Belarus, the role of the armed forces under Lukashenka's command – as a proxy guard of Russia's western defense frontiers – would only diminish, and so would the military-political indispensability of Lukashenka for Russia. The main problem, however, will arise for any future government trying to pursue the national interests of Belarus. A Russian military foothold would likely be perceived as a factor undermining the option of political integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic community of democratic nations, and so effectively limiting the sovereign freedom of policy choice for Belarus in the future. The BNR *Rada* session passed a resolution ruling the placement of Russian military bases in Belarus unacceptable. Recognizing that military, security and defense aspects have been steadily gaining in importance for the country's situation, the President of the *Rada* announced the appointment of Mr Siarhiej Navumčyk (Prague) as the Secretary of Defense.

One unusual aspect of the last BNR *Rada* session was the address by the former US ambassador in Belarus David Swartz. Ambassador Swartz was the only member of in the Western diplomatic community who 16 years ago recognized the importance of the BNR *Rada* for Belarus following Lukashen-

ka's takeover (David H. Swartz. "Belarus Democracy Continues In Diaspora", *The Belarusian Review*, Spring 1997). Now he has presented a position arguing that the U.S. government should recognize the BNR *Rada* as the legitimate authority of Belarus, instead of Alexander Lukashenka's government.

During the following brief exchange of views it was e.g. recalled that as early as October 18, 1918, the BNR *Rada* — still incumbent in Belarus — directed a formal appeal to the president of the United States, pleading him to recognize the sovereignty of the Belarusian Democratic Republic and its democratic government, thus averting the imminent end of their existence. That call went unanswered. The consequences were stark: the occupying Germans, even as they began retreating, refused to arm the Belarusian government, not recognized by any of the victorious Great Powers. Six weeks later, the *Rada* had to abandon Belarus' capital; on December 10, 1918 it was invaded by Soviet Russia's Red Army. It's a pity that at that time there were no sympathetic American voices supporting an independent democratic Belarus and the BNR *Rada.*

The *Rada* voted to approve ambassador Swartz's position. Belarus has developed a problem unique in today's Europe, which would all too likely require untypical remedies. The *Rada* President's subsequent comment on ambassador Swartz's statement (also available in this issue of *BR*) demonstrates that the *Rada* is immediately capable to formulate specific policy principles for its mission in that capacity — already at this very early proposal stage. Ambassador Swartz's proposal is radical: but – as it is highly unclear what the circumstances of Lukashenka regime's final decline and downfall will be – it would not be prudent to discard any option as unthinkable. The *Rada*, with its original mandate to set up a democratic system in Belarus, would be uniquely positioned to provide unselfish leadership, relying on the support and co-operation from a wide range of pro-democratic forces in Belarus poised to benefit from its work. As a recognized sovereign entity, it would also be able to mobilize resources sufficient to see through the transition, supervising free elections and overseeing the re-establishment of democracy in Belarus, thus completing its historical mission. A democratically elected authority in Belarus taking over as the *Rada* lays down its mandate is what should have happened, in more fortunate historical circumstances, back in 1918: 95 years later probably it still has to.

Belarusians Officially Recognized as National Minority in the Czech Republic

In 2010, at the beginning of our campaign for the recognition of Belarusians as a national minority in the Czech Republic, our exclusive goal was to achieve this result.

Earlier attempts by representatives of the local Belarusian community did not go beyond talks with individual representatives of the Czech political society; they were often told that their chances of achieving this result are very small, and that, in general, the issue is too complicated ...

Taking into account this experience, the Belarusian community has decided to tackle the issue of recognition from a different angle: by first analyzing the Czech laws on requirements for the official recognition of a national minority, in order to determine Belarusians' realistic chances, — and, on basis of this analysis, by mapping out a new strategy of action.

The initiators of this new process belonged to the civic association PAHONIA, based in Prague. There were five: the artist **Adam Kalita**, the businessman **Vitali Tsimoshchanka**, as well as members of the editorial staff of the publication *Belarusian Review* — its editor-in-chief **George Stankevich**, assistant editor and an international relations specialist **Hanna Vasilevich**, and the web-site editor and jurist **Kiryl Kascian**.

The necessary legal analysis was prepared by Mr. Kascian. The analysis has recognized the necessity of adding an opinion by an expert historian , that would provide an evaluation of Belarusians' historical presence in today's Czech lands. Ms. Vasilevich was instrumental in finding such an expert in person of **Prof. Milada Polišenská**, and in cooperation with her.

Prof. Polišenská's historical research has been focused on Communist repressions in Czechoslovakia after World War II, as well as on issues of nation-building and nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe. Prof. Polišenská, who is well acquainted with Belarus-related issues in the context of her research, has agreed to provide the necessary expert opinion. At this point we would like to single out the exclusive role of Hanna Vasilevich in coordinating the preparation of the expert opinion and the necessary legal documents. These efforts made it possible to produce mutually agreed and consolidated texts, later favorably accepted by Czech authorities.

We would also like to thank **George Stankevich** for his coordination of translations, for his many years of successful work for the Belarusian cause in the Czech Republic, as well as for his belief in the necessity of this recognition.

The basic legal document was the appropriate **Memorandum** containing the request to recognize Belarusians as a national minority. Its text was based on the analysis of Czech legislation and on the expert opinion; it was prepared by **Kiryl Kascian**. The memorandum has been forwarded to President Václav Klaus, Prime Minister Petr Nečas, and the chairs of both chambers of the Czech Re-

public's parliament : Přemyslav Sobotka (Senate), and Miroslava Němcová (Lower House). All their replies were generally favorable, although referring the matter to the proper institution: the Government Council for National Minorities.

The attitude of the Czech government itself was also favorable; representatives of the Belarusian community have been regularly invited as guests to the meetings of the Council for National Minorities. Czech authorities were connecting the issue of recognition with the 2011 census; according to its results, more than 2,000 ethnic Belarusians now live in the Czech Republic.

Due to the incomplete nature of the recognition process, the information about its progress has not been distributed on purpose. We wanted to be proud of positive results rather than of just our efforts. Besides, we did not want to speculate on the not yet adopted decision, and thus make publicity for ourselves. We also want to stress that among local Belarusians there existed a concensus on the necessity for the official recognition of Belarusians as a national minority; above described earlier efforts by other representatives of the Belarusian community testify to this.

After completing all formalities, the Czech government adopted the decision to expand the membership of the Government Council for National Minorities, by including it it as the Belarusian representative **Mr. Adam Kalita,** representing the civic association PAHONIA.

By being actively engaged in the process of minority recognition, and in the broader Belarusian civic and cultural work, the association PAHONIA has become a coordinating center of the Belarusian community in Prague. Its latest positive feature is the acquisition of the new Belarusian clubhouse in Prague — made possible primarily due to the efforts by **Vitali Tsimoshchanka,** and **Andrei Haiko** . The new clubhouse was festively opened in 2013 during the Day of Freedom celebrations, with president of the BNR *Rada*, Ivonka Survilla, and other honor guests participating. Various Belarusian cultural events are being regularly staged in the clubhouse; it also houses the . Belarusian library. Our friends and partners from Belarus and other countries are regularly supplementing the library's books..

In the name of the PAHONIA association we would like to thank all who helped to realize this historical event — **Prof. Milada Polišenská, Václav Smejkal, Prof. Jan Rychlík, Ivonka Survilla, Siarhiej Navumčyk,** and the entire BNR *Rada*, and also all others, who have helped in various possible ways. We sincerely appreciate this support, and believe that the achieved minority recognition will promote the interest in an ever closer cooperation between societies of our two countries. We also believe that it will bring about better opportunities for developing the Belarusian culture and language in the Czech Republic.

Prague, July 3, 2013
Council of the association PAHONIA

Concept of the Issue

The second issue of Belarusian Review in 2013 presents our readership a variety of articles devoted to the various Belarus-related topics.

This issue begins with the editorial ***Brave policy thinking: the time is now*** by **Mikalaj Pačkajeŭ** which opens a block of featured articles encompassing the current political situation in Belarus and its developments since 1994 when Aliaksandr Lukashenka took over the post of president of Belarus. In his text ***Time for a radical change in the U.S. relations with Belarus*** the former US ambassador to Belarus **David Swartz** presents his position arguing that the US government should recognize the BNR Rada as the legitimate authority of Belarus. It is subsequently followed by the BNR Rada President's statement on this matter. A deep overview of how Belarus' national symbols and the Belarusian language became Lukashenka's first target in abolishing constitutional legitimacy in Belarus with references to the Belarusian legislation is made by **Siarhiej Navumčyk** in his text ***The 1995 Referendum on national symbols and official languages was not legitimate***.

In his text ***A nation can fulfill itself only as a nation state*** Belarusian poet and diplomat **Hienadź Buraŭkin** recalls his experiences of serving as Belarus' representative to the United Nations from 1990 to 1994, paying particular attention to the maintenance of relations of the newly independent Belarusian state with the Belarusian Diaspora in the United States.

A well-known professor **Zachar Šybieka** in his interview ***Belarus-Israel: united by history*** compares the attitude of Belarusians and Jews to their own history and provides a comprehensive picture of what is uniting Belarus with Israel.

In his article ***On the official bilingualism in Belarus*** our editor-in-chief **George Stankevich** raises the issue of the real equality of Belarusian and Russian languages in Belarus. The language issue is also raised in the article ***Again on the Belarusian Trasianka*** by **Aleh Trusaŭ**, the chairman of the Belarusian Language Society, who discusses the role of this language phenomenon in today's Belarus.

Alena Makoŭskaja, the president of the World Association of Belarusians "Baćkaŭščyna" provides her vision on the need for adopting a new law on Belarusians living abroad and on its perspectives for the Belarusian minorities and diasporas worldwide. It is followed by the interview with **Vjačeslavs Telešs**, chairman of the Union of Belarusian artists of the Baltic Region ***"Maju Honar"***, who describes the current situation of Belarusians in Latvia.

Kiryl Kascian, the website editor of *Belarusian Review,* in his text ***Belarusian history à la BelTA*** discusses the approach of the Belarus' national news agency on writing names of prominent personalities from the Belarusian history. **Andrzej Tichomirow** in his article ***On the current "West-Russian" ideology in Belarus*** describes the main features and roots of this ideological trend rising in the Belarusian public space.

Professor **David R. Marples** provides his vision on the perspectives for the Belarus-Russia economic cooperation, while **Valer Bulhakaŭ** comments the fact of the renewed registration of the well-known Belarusian journal ARCHE.

In her interview with *Belarusian Review*, **Joanne Ivy Stankievich** introduces her book ***Living with a Scent of Danger: European Adventures at the Fall of Communism*** to readers of our journal and shares her views on some historical milestones covered by the book. It is followed by **Dr. Leonid Smilovitsky**'s preface to the memoir book by a native of Belarus Mikhail Mirkin entitled ***From Chereya to Chicago*** which provides the reader with "*the unique opportunity to retrace in detail the evolution of what is a typical Jewish family, which the Soviet authorities worked hard to assimilate into their system*" but "*did not achieve this objective*". Thus, "*consequently the departure of Mikhail along with his whole mishpucha to the USA seems to be naturally determined*."

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Dear Friends!

Belarusian Review is the oldest continuously published journal in English language fully devoted to Belarus: to its current political and economic situation, culture and history, as well as to Belarusian diaspora. Already for 25 years *Belarusian Review* has been fully filling this niche, both as a printed journal and since 2011 as an electronic edition made in cooperation with **The_Point Journal**, providing a broad audience interested in Belarusian matters with journalist, analytical and scholarly texts. People ranging from U.S. senators to European MPs to students in libraries in the United States and Europe, to Belarusians in their home country read the journal.

Our journal is undergoing changes which would enable it to expand its niche in the very dynamic world of the information age — in order to broaden the range of people interested in Belarusian matters. We are looking forward to receive contributions from new authors, particularly from young scholars and analysts dealing with issues related to Belarus.

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FEATURES

Time for a Radical Change in U.S. Relations with Belarus

By Ambassador (retired) David H. Swartz

Presentation to the Session of the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, New York, June 1, 2013.

America's Belarus policy since the mid-1990s has had little if any positive impact on the dictatorial regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka. His autocratic regime has evolved into a particularly dictatorial and brutal one. The United States officially declared that the December, 2010, presidential election in Belarus was fatally flawed and that, consequently, Lukashenka is not the legitimate president of Belarus. He responded with the most brutal repression yet of Belarus' democratic opposition.

The time has come for the United States to look elsewhere for genuinely democratic governance in Belarus. Specifically—and with all responsibility and seriousness of purpose—I call on the United States to extend formal diplomatic and legal recognition to the Rada of Belarus' government-in-exile, the Belarusian Democratic Republic or BNR, as the country's legitimate authority.

The BNR was democratically elected during Belarus' short-lived independence following World War I. This government went into exile following the Bolsheviks' forcible occupation and annexation of the country in 1919-20. It has functioned as a democratic government in exile—with both executive and legislative components—continuously since then. Late in 2012, at a historic meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania, leading Belarusian opposition figures signed a compact with the head of the Rada's Executive recognizing the BNR's lead role in restoring freedom and democracy to Belarus' populace and pledging their full support and cooperation.

There are numerous precedents in U.S. diplomatic history where America recognized governments-in-exile and, through them, achieved positive results for the countries involved, for the United States, and for the cause of international peace and stability. For example, at the outbreak of World War II, the U.S. diplomatic representation in Poland followed Poland's government-in-exile first to France, then to England. With the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of the war in 1945, the United States resumed in-country diplomatic relations with the Polish government.

Already at the outbreak of the war, U.S. attention in this context turned also to Moscow's rapacious expansion of Soviet tyranny, specifically in the Baltic Sea region. There, the countries of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia—all of whom, like Belarus, declared independence following World War I—were quickly overrun by Soviet forces early in World War II. Unlike Belarus, however, they had managed to remain independent in the inter-war period, were recognized by the U.S., and had diplomatic representations in Washington.

Naturally, those countries' forced integration into the U.S.S.R. in 1940 did not sit well with the U.S. government. In what came to be known as the Welles Declaration—for Acting Secretary of State Sumner Welles—the U.S. in July 1940 issued a policy declaration condemning Moscow's annexation of the three Baltic states and refusing to recognize the legitimacy of Soviet control over them. The principal drafter of this document was Ambassador Loy Henderson, who had extensive on-the-ground experience with both Soviet Russia and the Baltic region. The policy, of course, reflected the views of President Roosevelt.

The Welles Declaration remained U.S. policy for five decades, until the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991. During that period the three countries maintained relations with the United States through legations in Washington, D. C. With the end of the Soviet era, the U.S. continued formal relations with all three via resident U.S. embassies in Vilnius, Riga, and Tallinn. In what with hindsight must be considered serious missteps, the U.S. extended recognition neither to Belarus' 1918 democratically elected government nor to its government-in-exile. As noted above, that government has existed continuously from then until now.

Fast-forwarding to the end of 2012, yet another precedent emerged. On December 11, the United States joined several other countries in according recognition to opposition forces in Syria. President Obama, in a TV interview the next day, stated: "We've made a decision that the Syrian Opposition Coalition is now inclusive enough of the Syrian population that we consider them the legitimate representative of the Syrian people in opposition to the Assad regime." The State Department spokesperson added that the U.S. decision reflects the progress the Syrian Opposition Council has made in establishing organizational structures and in making connections with the political opposition on the ground.

The Syria step is, to put it mildly, risky for the U.S. and the other countries according recognition to the opposition coalition. No one really knows who these people are and, crucially, whom if anyone they represent within the country. And with the eventual demise of the Assad regime, who knows if these individuals and the people they claim to represent will actually work together or, indeed, whether centripetal forces may be the result, leading to even more chaos for the Syrian people, for our friends in the neighborhood, and for the international community.

The risks and challenges facing the U.S. as a result of its Syria decision point the way, ironically, to dealing with the Belarus conundrum. There, non-president Lukashenka (the official U.S. view) has ruled with ever-increasing tyranny since 1994 (when he did win the presidency in what was then arguably viewed as a free and fair election). Over the years the U.S. has wasted tens of millions of dollars in ineffectual, indeed counterproductive, "assistance" projects. The result is a dictator seemingly more firmly in control now than when he first came to power. The aftermath following the December, 2010, presidential "election"—where no one, including rival presidential candidates, was immune from KGB terror unleashed personally by Lukashenka—demonstrated the sad truth of the West's inability to effect positive societal change in Belarus.

The time is ripe for a more radical approach, one wholly in line with U.S. historical policies in the region and the more recent Syria precedent. The Vilnius Memorandum formally linking the Belarus Democratic Republic-in-exile and key political opposition forces in-country provides Washington with a unique opportunity. Let the U.S. now send Lukashenka and his minions the powerful message of non-recognition. Let us instead recognize Belarus' long-standing exiled government and allied in-country groups who all along have shared our traditional values of democratic governance and respect for human rights. And let us through our renewed commitment to Belarus' democratic renaissance put others on notice in its neighborhood and beyond who may see Belarus as a pawn in one or another cynical geopolitical game.



Ambassador Swartz, Ivonka Survilla

BNR *Rada* Can Initiate a "Marshall Plan for Modernization of Belarus"

During the June 1, 2013, Session of the *Rada* of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in New York, the members were addressed by the former US ambassador in Belarus David Swartz . He outlined the argument in support of his proposal for the United States of America to recognize the BNR *Rada* as the legitimate authority of Belarusian statehood, while withdrawing that recognition from the authorities under Aliaksandr Lukashenka.

The *Rada* passed a resolution to approve the position presented by Ambassador Swartz. The President of the *Rada* Ivonka Survilla gave an interview to *Salidarnaść* on this occasion.

Mrs Survilla, what is the point of Ambassador Swartz's proposal? It is a widely known fact that you, as the President of the *Rada*, are already received in European countries at a high level…

The BNR *Rada* has been a legitimate representative of the Belarusian statehood. Belarusians are not the first nation to have a so-called "Exile government", and this has not been forgotten in Europe. Meanwhile Ambassador Swartz has raised the issue for the United States to extend formal diplomatic and legal recognition to Belarus' government-in-exile, the *Rada* of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, as the country's legitimate authority"

Here I should refer to a few facts from history.

From the very point it was invested with state authority by the All-Belarusian Congress in 1917, the *Rada*'s objective has been to set up a democratic political system in Belarus, under a government elected in free and fair elections. The *Rada* had scheduled to convene the Belarusian Constituent Assembly on December 1, 1918. However, as you would know, this did not happen due to the Red Army offensive, resulting in the Belarusian Democratic Republic's occupation by the army of Soviet Russia.

As the *Rada* continued its work in exile, it set in its Statute that it would pass on its mandate to a future democratic authority in Belarus, provided the country's independence is assured.

So, as you see, the *Rada*'s main objective has been to establish a democratic authority in Belarus.

By the way, why was the mandate not laid down in the early 1990s, when Belarus was proclaimed independent? There was the example of Ukraine: the *Rada* of the Ukrainian Democratic Republic did hand over its mandate.

Yes, at that time some senior figures from the government of Belarus (above all, Prime-Minister Kebič and Minister of Foreign Affairs Kraŭčanka) did make efforts to secure the *Rada*'s relinquishing of its mandate. However, Jazep Sažyč, my predecessor as the *Rada*'s President, refused to go along. That was because, firstly, there existed no democratically elected authority in Belarus (the existing Supreme Soviet had been elected under Soviet Communism). And secondly, we did not trust that independence was assured and irreversible. In taking that position we were proven right by the events that followed.

It is correct that the *Rada* of the Ukrainian Democratic Republic handed in its mandate in 1992 to the President of Ukraine, at a solemn ceremony attended by the members of parliament and ministers of the cabinet. However, one could subsequently hear from our Ukrainian friends that the change happened prematurely.

Let me stress, the BNR *Rada* does not aim to take the government's place upon its return to Belarus. The *Rada* will hand its historical mandate to a democratically elected authority, as is, by the way, unambiguously stipulated in the *Rada*'s current Statute. And today we aim to do all we can for such a democratic authority to come into existence in Belarus as soon as possible.

Do you not believe that Lukashenka might go for some democratic reforms under the pressure of either internal or external factors?

I completely exclude such a possibility.

In fact, the assumption that the state-political system formed over the 19 years under Lukashenka's tyranny has got no more internal ability, under any circumstances, to regain democratic legitimacy, lies exactly at the basis of Ambassador Swartz's initiative.

Therefore it would only be right to make it possible for the transition from dictatorship to democracy to take place under the aegis of an internationally-recognized institution of the Belarusian statehood from outside of Lukashenka's system. And that institution (here we speak of the BNR *Rada*) shall then take no part in the democratic political forces' competing for power in Belarus.

As you may have noticed, even today we keep above any inter-party disputes. The BNR *Rada* supports equally all those forces in Belarus that stand for the country's independence, the establishment of democracy, for the preservation and development of our national culture values.

I've been very pleased that, last November in Vilnius we signed a Memorandum regarding the protection of Belarus's independence with the leaders of Belarusian parties and organizations. It is very important that the leaders of parties and organizations would rise above any interpersonal disputes (while such disputes are perhaps inevitable in politics, still there are values in relation to which those must take a back seat).

Should the BNR *Rada* be internationally recognized (like the Polish Government-in-Exile during World War II, or the Syrian opposition coalition today), what will you regard as your work priority?

An answer to this question cannot be brief. The BNR *Rada* will use its status as a subject of international law in orders to secure objectives in three areas.

Firstly, as a subject of international law recognized by the USA and – as can be expected – by a number of other states, the *Rada* would be able to mobilize international resources appropriate for speeding up the restoration of democracy in Belarus. The *Rada* will then be free to achieve that goal by any such means that foreign states are today unprepared to use against the tyranny in Miensk.

You may see that Lukashenka – having refused reforms – is forced by the economic deterioration in Belarus to con-

cede to Russia, figuratively speaking, new "slices" of the country's sovereignty. This involves giving up to Russia those state companies on which the state budget of Belarus relies for revenue. Russian corporations have been granted exceptional terms. And finally, there is an increase in Moscow's military presence (by the way, the last Session of the *Rada* adopted a statement against the placement of Russian military facilities in Belarus).

Thus, the BNR *Rada* in that new capacity will secure precautionary international measures so as to protect the sovereign status of Belarus against those dangers which may arise during the most difficult and final stages of Lukashenka's system crisis, when attempts to self-preservation at any cost may be made by the regime's leadership with reliance on Russia.

Secondly, today in Belarus, as well as in foreign observers' minds, there is little hope left that a change of power in Belarus can occur by means of democratic procedures involving the authorities formed by Lukashenka (I mean the Central Elections Commission, but not limited to that). Hence a question arises as to what will be the institution under the political supervision and aegis of which the first democratic elections could take place and the system of fair democratic process started. Should the *Rada*'s international recognition - as argued for by Ambassador Swartz – take place, the *Rada* would be able to serve Belarus in such a capacity.

The recognition by the USA and other countries as the legitimate provisional body of authority will definitely provide to the *Rada* the status necessary to carry out that task according to the best of international experience and examples: by relying on the support of the Belarusian politically active society, as well as drawing all the internal and international organizational and expert resources.

And thirdly, it is most likely that Belarus will be left by Lukashenka's regime with its economy deeply ravaged, as well as hugely burdened by foreign debt. As an international legal entity, the *Rada* – utilizing the recognition from the United Stated and other countries – will be able to initiate the creation of – to call it figuratively – a "Marshall Plan for the Modernization of Belarus".

Such a plan could then be activated immediately upon the restoration of democratic legitimacy of the country's authority. The *Rada*'s objective, in this area, shall be to hand over to the new Belarusian democratic government not only the historical statehood tradition of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, and the historical seal of the BNR *Rada*, but also a ready-made comprehensive package of international assets. That shall enable the people of Belarus at large to feel the benefits of their newly-restored freedom and to start rising economically as early as possible.

Belarusians are a very hard-working nation. The BNR *Rada* shall strive to lay in Belarus the foundations for a country in which it will be a pleasure to live and of which it will be truly possible to be proud.

Outlining the arguments in support of his proposal, David Swartz said the recognition of the BNR *Rada*, and the consequences of that recognition, would be in the interest of the East-European region. What is that interest?

The success of a free and Belarusian Belarus that would become a regional example of democracy, supremacy of law, guaranteed human rights, national self-realization, economic development and creation of high-quality social conditions for life, would cause a dramatic change in the whole outlook of the area between the Black and Baltic seas. And by doing so, it will put the historical end to the USSR legacy, as well as to Russia's neo-imperial endeavors.

The BNR *Rada* has a very precise vision of the kind of Belarus the foundations of which it intends to lay on the principles of the Belarusian Democratic Republic. These principles are freedom, independence and the people's right to realize its entitlement to a worthy, prosperous life on their own land.

Translation from Belarusian, originally an interview by Michaś Valkovič at http://www.gazetaby.com

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The 1995 Referendum on National Symbols and Official Languages Was not Legitimate

By Siarhiej Navumčyk

On May 14, 1995 Belarus held a referendum on four questions, proposed by the president Aliaksandr Lukašenka. The procedure of assigning the referendum as well as its conduct took place in violation of the valid Constitution and the laws.

The dubious legitimacy of questions

In March 1995 the president Aliaksandr Lukašenka proposed the Supreme Council to conduct a refendum on following questions:

- *Do you agree with assigning Russian language the status of an official language, equal to that of the Belarusian language?*
- *Do you support the proposal on introducing the new State Flag and State Coat of Arms of the Republic of Belarus?*
- *Do you support the actions of the president of the Republic of Belarus, aimed at the economic integration with the Russian Federation?*
- *Do you agree with the necessity to introduce changes in the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, that provide the possibility of early terminating mandates of the Supreme Council by the president of the Republic of Belarus, in the case of systematic or gross violations of the Constitution?*

However, the subjects of the proposed referendum have realized Lukašenka's long-time political positions. Already in the beginning of September 1991 the Supreme Council deputy Lukašenka criticized Belarus' Declaration of Independence, which took place a week before, on August 25th. In the summer of 1993 Lukašenka promoted the renewal of the Soviet Union. During the election campaign of 1994 he was wearing not the "official" white-red-white ,

but the "BSSR" red-green deputy label; in his pre-election program he was promoting assigning Russian the status of Belarus' official language.

The questions of national and historical distinctness were not supposed to be placed on referendum

According to the art. 78 of then valid Consitution the referendum was supposed to be conducted in accordance with law.

Legal aspects of the referendum were determined by the law " On the nation-wide vote (referendum)". According to this law, questions of the national and historical distinctness were not allowed to be placed on referendum (in other words: national language, and national-historical values do not belong to the current generation; so it does not have the right to deprive of them future generations, and generally, to decide for the ancestors and descendants.) Precisely , two out of four questions proposed by A. Lukašenka dealt with these issues: on official status of the Russian language, and on official state symbols. It is worthwhile noting that a few months prior to the referendum the Central Commission on this ground refused a group of citizens to conduct a referendum on the issue of languages; five parliamentary commissions reached the same negative conclusions, since the group's proposal was not in accordance with law.

As later remarked the doctor of law, former member of te Constitutional Court, professor Michail Pastuchoŭ: "the provisions of the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Belarus imply that questions directed at lowering state guarantees of the existence of the Belarusian language, especially by reducing its role in comparison with other languages, shall not be placed on a republican referendum. Analogous implication may be applied to questions concerning the changes of the State Flag and Coat of Arms, as threatening the inalienable right of the Belarusian people for its national statehood."

Finally, art. 17 of the Constitution defined the Belarusian language as the state language, and Russian — as a language of inter-ethnic communications. Changing their status meant changing the Constitution. According to art. 148 (2) of the Constitution, **Constitution shall not be amended or supplemented during the last six months of the term of a Supreme Council.** Elections to the new Supreme Council were assigned on the same day as the referendum; if the new Supreme Council of the 13th convocation, were elected in its full composition, the mandate of the Supreme Council of the 12th convocation would not end earlier than 3 months after this election.

Thus, placing on the referendum questions about the language status and national symbols violated articles 17, 78, and 148(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, as well as the law "On the nation-wide vote (referendum."

Violations while assigning the referendum

According to the law, the referendum should have been assigned by the Supreme Council (of the 12th Convocation at that time). The Supreme Council was able to act in accordance with the Constitution and a number of laws, including the law "On status of a Supreme Council deputy," and the "Temporary Order of the Supreme Council."

On April 11, 1995 — as a sign of protest against the referendum — 19 deputies of the Supreme Council (members of the opposition Belarusian Popular Front - BNF) declared a hunger strike in the Oval Hall of the Parliament.

The action by the BNF deputies had an immediate and very important effect: afterwards the Supreme Coumcil did not confirm three out of four questions, proposed by the president (due to lack of quorum).

In the night from the 11th to 12th of April (after 2 AM) military, police, and special forces (over 600 people) were brought into the building of the Supreme Council. The striking deputies were beaten up by groups of masked persons, thrown into military vehicles and abandoned in the center of Minsk.

The fact of beating was registered after one hour by members of the so-called "medical commission" and confirmed by the special investigator of the general Prosecutor's office, Y. Brolišs. However, the investigation failed to identify those directly participating in the beating up of deputies. According to a later acknowledgement by the deputy commander of the KGB, they were officers of the KGB group "Alfa."

"The country is being ruled by a presidential junta" — told the writer Vasil Bykau correspondents of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Only after the beating of striking BNF deputies did the Supreme Council confirm the four referendum questions, proposed by A. Lukašenka.

According to Prof. M. Pastuchoŭ, " only the fact of using physical violence against the deputies by 'persons in camouflage uniforms' (and in the parliament building !) casts doubt on the legitimacy of the Supreme Council' decision on the referendum assignment, since it was adopted under duress. The very introduction of armed persons into the parliament's building and the assault on deputies may be qualified as a vioent usurption of power."

Thus, the procedure of assigning the referendum took place in violation minimally of the law "On the status of a Supreme Council deputy " (according to which each deputy enjoys personal immunity)," the " Temporary Order of the Supreme Council," and the Criminal Code.

Violations during the pre-referendum campaign

The law " On the nation-wide vote (referendum)" foresaw providing the citizens full information on the questions placed on referendum, and also equal opportunity to campaign "for" and "against."

During the several weeks preceding the referendum the state-run TV and radio conducted a non-stop campaign in support of Lukašenka's position. Only on TV the length of such referendum-focused programs amounted to tens of hours. At the same time its opponents had no opportunity to air their views. Elections to the Supreme Council of 13th convocation were scheduled to take place on May 14th as well. In accordance with laws, candidates had the right to appear in mass media. However, all words expressing their opposition to questions of the referendum were cut from their speeches.

Thus, campaigning on questions of the referendum s took place in violation of these laws : " On the nation-wide vote (referendum)", "On elections to the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus," and "On the status of a Supreme Council deputy. "

Violations during the voting process

The officially registered observers determined numerous violations during the vote itself. The violations were encountered in **every voting district** covered by observers from the BNF party (which presented its candidates in more than 100 voting districts.)

On May 21st the Sojm of BNF declared that "the vote on referendum, especially in rural localities, was falsified by the executive authorities and their representatives in electoral committees. This may be testified by numerous facts, encountered by the observers representing the BNF and other parties. We have testimonies that in many rural districts the number of voters who came to vote, amounted to less than half of those entered in voting lists. The numbers of persons who actually voted, was augmented. Nevertheless, less than 50% of the total number of voters voted in favor of the second and fourth questions of the referendum (national symbols and the president's right to dissolve the parliament).

Let us note that this was the official statement of an officially registered political party, submitted to the Central Electoral Committee, and never repudiated by it.

Actually, on April 12th the head of state, Aliaksandr Lukašenka was supposed to be removed from power, in connection with the gross violation of the Constitution - since by his decision to conduct a referendum on changing national symbols and assigning the Russian language the status of an official language, he has exceeded his powers , granted him by the Constitution.

Thus, during the assignment and conduct of the 1995 referendum at least the following laws were violated:
Articles 17, 78, and 148 (2) of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, the Laws on the nation-wide vote (referendum, on elections to the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus, on status of a Supreme Council deputy, and the Temporary Order of the Supreme Council.

The articles of the **Criminal Code** are a special topic. They may be applied to the actions by members of police and special services on April 12, 1995.

I am convinced that: for the future democratically elected Belarus' head of state (or parliament, if the state will return to a parliamentary republic), returning the official status of national symbols: the White-red-white Flag and the Coat of Arms "Pahonia," as well as the sole official status of the Belarusian language — will represent the renewal of legality and legitimacy.

Source: *RFE/RL, Belarusian Service,* May 14, 2013

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A People can Realize itself to its Fullest only as a Nation State

By Hienadź Buraŭkin

My assignment to the post of Belarus' Representative to the Organization of United Nations in 1990 was not for me a planned turn of fate. On the contrary, it came as a complete surprise. At that time the Soviet society began experiencing processes of democratization. Belarus witnessed the awakening of new intellectual forces, and the appearance of new civic organizations, specifically — of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF).

As the director of the State TV and Radio (**Editor's note:** and an established poet), I considered it my duty to cover these processes and public discussions in our programs. We let Zianon Paźniak air his views, spoke about the BPF convention over the border in Vilnia, about the organization "Memorial," and even about the mass pilgrimage around the Moscow cemetery in Minsk — even though not very extensively. All this elicited serious objections from the then ideological leaders. In their opinion, Paźniak should not have been allowed to speak on air; in general, we should not have been featuring events, that did not fit the routine of Soviet everyday life, placing in question the authority of the Communist Party and the government.

Since I could not agree with this, I suggested that my ideological bosses instead use the state airwaves to fully respond to Paźniak. Of course, since they couldn't agree with anything like it; the conflict between us then became obvious. There were attempts to dislodge me from my influential post in the state media. I was not ready to give in, although I understood that that they will make my life in that post difficult. So, when I was offered the rather ceremonial post of representing the Belarusian Soviet Republic (BSSR) at the United Nations, I agreed after lengthy soul searching, being aware of the political climate in the BSSR. Thus I showed up in New York, absolutely unprepared to perform the required diplomatic duties.

This period was for me fairly complicated. It consisted of two phases: initially I was representing the BSSR, and later the newly independent Belarus. When I was representing the BSSR, the significance of my post, as well as that of my country in the United Nations was quite modest. Everything was decided by the representative of the Soviet Union. Fortunately for me, the Soviet Union's ambassador at the United Nations at that time was an excellent diplomat — Yuliy M. Vorontsov. He was not only an experienced ambassador, but also a very inteligent human being who treated me in a very friendly fashion, and helped me whenever I lacked the necessary knowledge or intuition. I soon became convinced that in reality the significance of our diplomats in New York was purely formal. Therefore, the representatives of other countries rarely consulted with us when preparing projects requiring important decisions; it was known that representatives of Ukrainian and Belarusian Soviet republics would always follow the decisions of the Soviet Union's ambassador. Such was the reality: we not only did not have an

independent diplomatic policy, but we also lacked our own diplomatic school. Whereas, for instance, Ukrainians had numerous people prepared for work abroad, the corresponding Belarusian group was very small. At that time, Soviet Belarus had no diplomatic missions in the world, other than at the UN.

However, with the declaration of Belarus' independence, the situation changed radically. We, representatives of the Republic of Belarus began to be treated quite differently: when documents were being prepared, we were approached for consultations ahead of time, and asked to express our position on the matter. We became practically equal among our colleagues; serious diplomatic work began. However, we lacked both experience and personnel, or even the understanding that our interests might be fully or partially taken into account with adequate preparation on our side. In Belarus itself, most officials and parliamentarians had little personal confidence or self-assurance, that they were now representing an independent state ! The ingrained habit of looking either to Moscow or other centers of world politics, remained. They lacked an independent policy, so we and others had to learn on-the-go.



Hienadź Buraŭkin

It's worthwhile remembering that at that time our country changed its name — from the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (or Byelorussia) to the Republic of Belarus. In using the new English-language name we adopted the position at the UN that we should teach the world to call us the way we call ourselves — Belarus. It was a manifestation of strength of character; I believe our descendants will appreciate the correctness of that decision.

I consider one of my best diplomatic achievements the fact that we began to communicate closely with the Belarusian Diaspora. We were aware that the main intellectual forces of the Belarusian emigre community were located in the metropolitan New York area, forming one of its most active and influential centers. I personally realized early on that our emigre community was not at all the community portrayed to us in BSSR. In Soviet Belarus, for long decades, many people were practically brought up to consider the emigres as our enemies. As a result, our foreign compatriots had developed a guarded attitude to us as representatives of the Soviet Union — and we to them, since we didn't know who they are, how they live, and how did they wound up on the other side of the ocean. Many in Belarus even now don't reflect on the fact that the emigre core is formed by people young enough, who under any historical circumstances, could not have soiled their hands with blood of their countrymen, as they were all depicted by the Soviet propagands.

I remember how the poets Natallia Arsieńnieva and Masiej Siadnioŭ admitted that they felt uneasy during their first acquantance with me; for them I was a person from Soviet Belarus, from whose government they experienced nothing but hatred. Only later they understood, that despite our different fates we were united and brought closer by our Belarusianness — the Belarusian language, culture and history. To a certain degree this became apparent in our relations with Vitaŭt Kipiel, Janka Zaprudnik, Anton Šukielojć. This shared feeling of unity and devotion to the Homeland allowed us to understand each other. What resulted was not simply cooperation, but often even friendship. We invited our emigres to all events staged by our UN Mission, and they were always happy to attend. We have always emphasized the cultural aspect. We marked anniversaries of Kupala, Kolas, Bahdanovič; musical groups "Pieśniary" and "Siabry" visited us with concerts. Our emigres saw how dear it was to us, and we saw, how dear it was to them. In relations with our Diaspora I truly grasped the role of language in the fate of a person and country. When you live in a foreign country among foreign people, hearing the native word becomes your password and testimony. We often do not perceive it when living in Belarus. Among other peoples we may be defined by economy or technology; yet the main distinctiveness is our language. It makes you unique, valued and respected in the world.

The favorable attitude to the emigres by the then Belarus' minister of Foreign Affairs, Piatro Kraŭčanka, helped us to bring about amicable relations with the Belarusian Diaspora. An important factor in this rapprochement was the Diaspora's recognition that the spirit of Belarusianness woke up in Belarus — perhaps not yet on the desired scale — not only in the countryside and among the intellectuals, but also among some higher officials, like Prime Minister Kiebič, or Minister Kraŭčanka. Therefore, when the white-red-white flag and the coat of arms "Pahonia" were confirmed by the Supreme Soviet as official state symbols, our emigres brought us their own white-red-white flag, while we were busy specifying and ordering a correctly dimensioned flag, one according to the UN standards.

In that period our compatriots have begun visiting the land of their birth, for the first time after decades of absence. Then a joyful mood prevailed — both among the emigrants, able to visit their relatives and close friends — and among some official representatives of Belarus. They saw in the emigres good people, compatriots, anxious to help the Homeland in any way they could. This assistance was mainly centered on historical research and economic ties. I remember those years as a happy period in our relations.

Unfortunately, lately our contacts have weakened. Again, they are being clouded by official mistrust. The moods of suspicion and guardedness are returning. Such a stand on the part of our government is unjust and not wise. I remember the dedicated Belarusian poet-patriot Masiej Siadnoŭ, who was unjustly and cruelly punished by Soviet authorities. Yet he found in himself the fortitude to forgive Belarus for his past treatment; he was glad to be able to return with a visit. Why then the Belarusian state does not want to forgive this man, even if in its view he might have been guilty of something? What kind of severe authority is that, that expects being pardoned for everything it has committed — even when its actions were clearly unjust and anti-Belarusian — and yet does not forgive its own citizens for anything? It troubles me that now, despite the growth of emigration, one often does not observe any strengthened traditions of open devotion to the key cause— the Belarusian cause.

The current practice by the Belarusian authorities does not help. It may be defined as striving to return to Soviet times with its powerful officialdom, excessive pragmatism in the spiritual sphere, and in their underestimation of the national cultural factor, often even combating it. I would not say that now less is known and talked about Belarus. However, it is often referred to as a country bent on moving back history, and as the last dictatorship in Europe. The main guilt for this lies with the top state leadership. And, although it distresses me to state it, I also place guilt on our people for their mentality, for tolerating the pressure exerted on it. It seems to me, that Belarusians at times lack the decisiveness to exclaim for once: "Enough ! We are a civilized country ! Our distinctiveness rests in our history and our character, not in the pro-Soviet course of development which is being forced upon us; we won't let anyone decide our fate for us !"

In my opinion, the most glaring illustration of what is happening in our country is the so-called "Stalin Line," with its falsified treatment of events of the Great Patriotic War (**Ed. note**: WW II). Unfortunately, the "Stalin Line" is not just awar museum; it permeates the entire state ideology, although not as openly as before. And I am worried about the future of our country. I do believe that any people can realize itself to its fullest only as a nation state. Only within the borders of its own nation state do people have full opportunity to realize their talents, show their distinctiveness, and secure a worthy life for themselves.

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THOUGHTS & OBSERVATIONS

Again on the Belarusian "Trasianka"

By Aleh Trusau

After the publication of my interview with *Naša Niva*, entitled *"Speak Out in Trasianka"* by a young journalist without my knowledge, who used out of context a few of my jocular words, the topic of *Trasianka* became rather popular in the mass media - especially on the Internet.

After having read some of the postings on various blogs, as well as comments to them, I would immediately like to state : while analyzing various forms of *Trasianka*, constituting basic elements of the Belarusian language, I respect those who speak in *Trasianka,* but do strive, and I stress **strive** to use it as a gradual transition to the wide use of the contemporary literary Belarusian.

However, I have never advocated to use it in writing. Unless *Trasianka* serves to illustrate a person's speech in a work of art, one should write in the contemporary literary language - right off the bat.

As an example I would bring the experience of the Moscow-based journalist Kaciaryna Kibalčyč, who calls herself a *Trasianka*-speaking person, and who has decided, first in Moscow and later in Minsk, to organize courses of Belarusian for those speaking in *Trasianka,* like herself. This initiative generated wide support and distribution). Not by accident.

Let us turn to the history of this issue. A a linguistic term, *Trasianka* first appeared in the 1990s. It was possibly Zianon Pazniak, who used it first.

It first appeared as a Polish-Belarusian linguistic penomenon in the 17th and especially in the 18th century - among our nobility and magnates. One may recall the famous speech by *Mialeška* in the 17th century Sojm (Parliament), in which he exhorted the Sojm members to keep speaking Belarusian , their native language. After the partition of the Polish-Litvanian Commonwealth in the beginning of the 19th century, the process of cultural Polonization, favored by the Russian tsar Alexander I, became even stronger. The city elites began using a version of Polish; real Poles called it the *Kresy*(border-land,) or *simple* language. The influence of the original Belarusian on it was noticeable. One may just read works by Mickiewicz or Kraszewski.

However, in the middle of the 19th century, and especially in the beginning of the 20th century the *Trasianka*speaking "Litvin" Belarusian nobility began creating the new Belarusian literary language — based on their *Trasianka* and on various Belarusian rural dialects. At that time also the Russian-Belarusian *Trasianka* originated in Belarus'cities.

I would like to recall that classic Belarusian writers, Janka Kupala, and Jakub Kolas produced their first poetry in Polish (Kupala), or Russian (Kolas). Their first texts in Belarusian contained many Polish or Russian words; gradually they disappeared or were replaced by others.

Much linguistic research has been conducted on the topic of *Trasianka.* Thus, in 2010 the Czech university from Usti nad Labem has published a monograph by Dr. Ina Kalita entitled "Contemporary Belarus: languages and national identity," listing various features of the contemporary Belarusian *Trasianka.* There exist publications on this topic by Siarhiej Zaprudski and other researchers. Therefore I think it is not necessary to concentrate on philological aspects. It may be better to refer to historical facts.

A new wave of total russification of public life has engulfed Belarus after 1959, when it became permissible to exempt students of Russian-language schools from learning Belarusian — on request of their parents. At that time all Belarusian-language schools in the cities were closed. In Minsk even the course on Belarusian literature was conducted in Russian.

In the Soviet Union it was customary to severely ridicule the Belarusian *Trasianka* and a similar Ukrainian linguistic phenomenon *Surzhyk.* Such a treatment was especially pronounced in the armed forces and universities; its intent was to induce the speakers of *Trasianka* to eventually switch to the "great and mighty" Russian.

The situation began to change during the Perestroika period, when *Trasianka* began leaving the underground and gradually replacing its negative significance with a positive one. Now a *Trasianka* carrier became intent not on rejecting everything Belarusian; on the contrary, he/she strove to become a real Belarusian, who knows his contemporary native language and uses it in everyday life. In my own case it took two years to go through this phase: from 1980 to 1982. During these years I have begun working with students , and have encouraged them to speak at first in *Trasianka,* and then transfer to using the literary Belarusian.

Among my former students there are now doctors and candidates of sciences, members of our current elite. They often began speaking in ordinary *Trasianka*; frankly, for a Russian-speaking Belarusian it is difficult to immediately start speaking like writers Hilevič or Karatkievič.

As a a matter of fact, our recent history records an interesting occurrence, when, in 1990-1991 the chairman of the BSSR Supreme Council, Mikalaj Dziemianciej, spoke in *Trasianka,* and conducted in it official proceedings. It was funny, and not really Russian.. Then the Supreme Council deputies began speaking Belarusian , and in 1994, in the first constitution of the independent Belarus, voted to make the Belarusian language the country's sole official language.

According to results of the 2009 sociological questionnaire, 22.5% of Belarus' inhabitants speak in *Trasianka*, and only 4.3% in the Belarusian literary language.

Thus, today *Trasianka* in Belarus should not be treated as a woodboring beetle, as in times of the Polish-Litvanian Commonwealth, or during the Soviet era, but rather as a bandage on the wounds of the long-oppressed Fatherland, as a transitory bridge to a truly European independent and democratic Belarus, where there will be only one official Belarusian language, and where people will know and use various languages, yet at home and at work, in communicating with children and their parents they will speak in their native Belarusian language.

Aleh Trusau, chairman of the Belarusian Language Society, candidate of historical sciences, docent, deputy of the Belarus' Supreme Council of the 12th convocation

Editor's Note by George Stankevich:

*Trasianka** is a linguistic phenomenon, specific to Belarus.

It may be defined as a **mixture** of two types of languages.

Type # 1 - **Belarusian**. Prior to the Russian revolution of 1917 it was primarily the native language of Belarus' countryside, quite distinct from the type #2 - **Russian**, the language of the conquering Russian empire and its officialdom.

Since the early 19th century, Russian, being the language of the Tsarist and later Soviet regimes, had full freedom of development, in contrast with the native language that was discriminated in many ways — such as closing Belarusian-language schools , virtual absence of university instruction in Belarusian.

Basic features of the mixture language:

1. It has retained specifically Belarusian phonetic and grammar features.

2. It has allowed a thin vocabulary deposit of Russian words, commonly used in the current colloquial public speech.

The "Russian" component of *Trasianka* results from the continued use of Russian as the public language of communication in Belarus.

Although this state of affairs is primarily due to the long-time discrimination of the Belarusian language, it is now **being maintained by the preferential treatment of Russian applied by the current regime.**

Trasianka has now become a grey zone between its native Belarusian component and one of the two literary (written) languages: Belarusian or Russian.

Speakers of *Trasianka* may eventually switch to one of them. Given the current status quo in Belarus, switching to Belarusian may be more difficult; it requires an individual's effort to overcome the apparent lack of language environment and language facilities.

*The term *Trasianka* is derived from the Belarusian verb *tresci* (to shake). .

On the Official Bilingualism in Belarus

By George Stankevich

Official bilingualism (or multilingualism) is a phenomenon specific not only to Belarus. Its version in a regional sense - has been in use for some time in several countries, those with multi-ethnic populations: Canada (with English and French, both official languages) Spain (with Catalan, Basque, Galician, and Castilian Spanish), Switzerland — with German, French, Italian and Rhaeto-Roman.

In all of these cases the region's ethnic majority language enjoys the status of the only official or a co-official language in a given region: it simply prevails in most spheres of public life. We may define this kind of official multilingualism, as **FAIR.** Theoretically, no regional language is being preferred at the expense of the other.

Then — further to the East, in the vast post-Soviet Eurasia, we tend to encounter another kind of official multi-

lingualism, historically based on the inter-ethnic reality of the former Soviet Union. On paper the Soviet Union proclaimed the equality of all nations and peoples. However, there was only one official state-wide language : Russian — which naturally became the prevalent language of communication. Non-Russian languages, even those used by larger ethnic groups and having a co-official status in Soviet republics, were mostly treated as a tool to foster the Soviet ideology or in certain cases (like in Belarus) as local folklore phenomena.

In the several years immediately following the Soviet collapse (1991-1994) the Belarusian language made significant strides: in public education and public life in general. What's more, it became Belarus' sole official language. This advance in its status was by no means violent in its application. A special law "On Languages" envisioned a gradual 10 year-long period of returning Belarusian to public life.

The situation changed drastically after the 1995 referendum, that made Russian a second official language. Considering the many violations in the event's conception and execution — all described in the article, by Siarhiej Navumčyk, the newly instituted bilingualism may be regarded as a **political tool,** designed to restore the status quo: the pre-1991 Soviet treatment of the native Belarusian language.

As a result, Russian now resumed its former role of the prevalent language of communication, enjoying the preferential treatment by Belarus' current authorities.

Taking into account former decades of Soviet-era Russification, the now existing bilingualism in Belarus is not just "abnormal," but definitely **NOT FAIR**. It is being used to push Belarusian out of public life , or, using the lately fashionable term, to "marginalize" it.

In practice, in many cases, when a Belarusian wishes to use his native language while dealing with various bureaucratic procedures, he/she encounters dozens of "insurmountable problems " (lack of forms in Belarusian , etc.), and is eventually advised to use Russian, since it's one of the country's official languages.

Today I would like to dwell on two practical aspects of the so-called "language equality": its **audio** , and **visual** impacts on today's public life in Belarus.

My descriptions are based both on my scanning various Belarus-based web-sites, as well as on my relatively recent visit of Belarus.

As far as language equality is concerned, I found the **audio impact simply catastrophic**.

Beginning with the omni-present Russian language on the state-run TV and radio, and ending with the exclusively Russian dubbing of foreign films, the citizen very rarely hears Belarusian - his native language.

In the modern supermarkets, one is greeted only in Russian, and all signs describing merchandise are in Russian.

Here is a suggestion how to insure language equality in this kind of public places: make the public announcements **alternately in one official language, and then in the other.** For instance: from 2 to 3 PM in Belarusian, and from 3 to 4 PM in Russian. This way everyone will be satisfied, and the general public will have a chance to hear its native language.

Of course, introducing this feature will require the cooperation of the otherwise strictly business-oriented stores. However, with proper directives from above (the nominally Belarusian state), it is achievable. The pressure from below, i.e. from the civil society might also help.

The **visual aspect** is somewhat better. At least the street signs in the cities and the road signs in the countryside are written in Belarusian.

Unfortunately, language equality is still lacking in **labeling various merchandise and products**. Here the native language is mostly ignored. The situation probably reached its peak of absurdity — when fish products made in the Belarusian city of Brest, near the border with Ukraine (potential market), are labelled in Russian and Ukrainian, but not in Belarusian.

United by History

What is uniting Belarus with Israel ? How is the Jewish culture being presented in contemporary Belarusian cities? What is antisemitism "Belarusian-style"?

Doctor of historical sciences, professor Zachar Šybieka, who in 2012 emigrated to Israel, talks about the Soviet "repatriates," and compares the attitude of Belarusians and Jews to their own history



Professor Zachar Šybieka

Viačaslaŭ Korsak: Last July you have moved to Israel, and settled in Haifa. What was your motive for undertaking this step?

Zachar Šybieka: Oh, I wish I precisely knew.. The love for one woman and of freedom in general. Coincidence of circumstances. Temptation of something new, not ordinary both in personal life and scientific creativity. It just happened. My Belarus could release me. I was not bound by anything. I became free - and flew away. My parents and wife passed away long ago. My daughter is now married. And in Israel I was expected by the woman I love. I

could not work anymore in the Belarusian State Economic University: I exhausted myself and was fed up with necessity to conform. The history is not respected there. And in Israel I have the opportunity to freely study Belarus' history.

I also became disappointed in activities of the civil society. Their effect in current Belarus is very small . In Israel I can continue working for my Fatherland's benefit with greater devotion. I could remain living in Belarus - sitting on my former laurels, aging, ailing. This is not for me. I do have strength and potential that wasn't possible to realize even in the Belarusian capital. I could afford emigration, but not the life of quiet degradation in my country.

VK: What was your impression of Israel, after having spent so many years in the soviet, and then post-soviet society? May one say, that "other people" live there?

ZŠ: Israel is not an ordinary country. Here there is a lot of sun and freedom. Varied and beautiful nature. And tghe Israelites are really others. They know their rights and know how to defend themselves. They are constantly looking for a deal of advantage to them. They very much respect themselves. Whenever they find something that's not in order, they immediately run to the doctor. The like to eat well, yet they work a lot and exercise. You'll almost never meet sad or drunk people on the street. Older people are very agile; they enjoy great respect here. Terrorists and rockets overhead do not especially disturb people. Everybody lives with his own worries. Fear and hystery don't exist. Israelites feel masters of their country.

VK: Haifa is inhaboted by many soviet repatriates. Many of them left in the time of Soviet Union's collapse, and have been living in Israel for more than 20 years. Have they changed in that time ? Have they overcome the "soviet" in themselves ?

ZŠ: The Russian language is heard everywhere in Haifa. One gets the impression of entering a Russian city. Immigrants from the former Soviet Union and post-Soviet countries , the so-called "Russian Jews," still live separately and create a separate sub-culture. They have substantially contributed to rasing the econmy and culture. And the state itself is helping the immigrants very much. There exists an entire ministry, dealing with problems of absorption, adaptations of new citizens to the Israeli way of life. Therefore former Communist party activists confidently participate in Israel's administrative apparatus, and are active in business. However, now and then the "Sovietness" shows. In the stores one may occasionally encounter the crudeness of older female employees. In governmental offices one may occasionally experience the soviet indifference to people. You my also meet people who don't like Israel. For them everything is bad. They are people from the Soviet Union who have not managed to adapt to the new living conditions. Yet children of these immigrants from the zone of soviet culture don't differ from the original Israeli settlers in any way. The Sovietness disappears, yet the sub-culture remains. The state is very tolerant to various social and ethnic groups: Ashkenazis, Sephardis, Ethiopians, Arabs. They are all - even Arabs - united by the general state patriotism. At the same time Judaism that preserved Jews for centuries, is gradually losing its influence. The Soviet Jews have substantially contributed to growth of atheism in the Israeli society.

VK: **What do Belarus and Israel have in common ?**

ZŠ: They are both smalll countries — with few useful mineral deposits. Israel's economy may serve as an example for Belarus. Itis an economy concentrated on processing and export of high technologies. Our countries are united by the century-long common history of Belarusians and Jews. We have a common language of communications — Russian. At the same time we are different — and thus interesting for each other. Our countries are simply fated to be in close contact and cooperation.

VK Now you are working for the University of Tel-Aviv, studying the history of Belarus' Jews. Was it difficult to find employment? Why did you choose precisely this topic for your research? Is Israel interested in it?

ZŠ: It was not simple to find employment. For half a year I had to intensively study Israel's official languge — Ivrit. Frankly, not too many professors are coming to Israel or to any other country. Finding jobs for scientists is being conducted by a special institution — the Center for Absorbing Scientists with the ministry of absorption. However, one's own initiative is required. One has to find an employer. Then the ministry of absorption concludes with him a contract on sharing the scientist's living expenses. My roaming might have taken long, if it wasn't for help by my friend and colleague Dr. Leonid Smilovitsky, a native of Minsk and a wonderful person. He presented me and my science merits before the Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center at the University of Tel-Aviv. I was also recommended by several other well-known Israeli historians. Only after that I was offered a job.

History is much respected in Israel. It consists of the era of ancient Israel, era of Jewish diasporas (world-wide dispersion of Jews after Torah people lost their statehood), and the era of the new Israel. Studying the histories of Jewish Diasporas in various countries allows perceiving the history of the Jewish people as being uninterrupted.

The interest in Jews of the grand Duchy of Litva (*Litvaks*), in Jews of Poland and Russia is great. The Jews of Belarus are somehow getting lost. To be precise, they are being listed as coming from Poland, Lithuania, Russia. The indexes of Israeli archives and libraries don't even have separate sections on Jews from Belarus.

First to speak about the Jews of Belarus, and to study the Belarusin Jewish diaspora was my colleague Leonid Smilovitsky. Now I came to help him. I believe that the interest of Israelites in the history of Jews of Belarus will grow along the widening of inter-state relations. All emigres from Belarus are well aware of places of their birth, and are transferring this memory to their children. The ancestors of many Jewish talents and known politicians were natives of Belarus — including the ancestors of Benjamin Netanyahu, the current Israeli prime minister.

VK: The Jews hold on to their history, collect it as puzzle, even in the case of such local topic, as the "Jews of Belarus." It is difficult to imagine, that te Belarusian Academy of Science would engage in the study of the history of Belarusians in the United States, Canada or Israel. Sometimes one gets the impression that Belarusians live in a historical vacuum — with no memory of their own history, language, identity. In your opinion, what causes these diametrically different approaches to their own history?

ZŠ: A certain answer to this question may be found in the comparative analysis of the history of the Belarusian nd Jewish people. This is exactly the problem on evaluation of which I will be working. Until now one may only express the previous remarks.

The Jewish calendar now lists the year 5773. Religious celebrations are being held in honor of Jewish biblical heroes. The historical tradition of Torah people has been maintained and polished in synagogues, and yeshivas; now its being preserved as sacred by the state of Israel.

The Belarusians do not possess such a long history, such a brilliant religion —Judaism, which secured the unity of the Jewish people in conditions of having lost their statehood. Belarus had few national preachers. And fraudulent preachers tell Belarusians that their history begins with Lenin-Stalin, that Kastuś Kalinoŭski was not a Belarus' national hero, and others.

Jews have something to be proud of ; they do know how to do it. Belarusians don't even know who were their ancestors. We don't have our own Torah. Chronicles, dealing with our past, have not been preserved. They have been destroyed or falsified on order of Russian rulers (from Catherine II to bolshevik leaders), in order to portray Belarusians as Russians, and to justify Russia's annexion plans.

VK: While speaking about the history of the Belarusian Jewry, one recalls the "Pale of Settlement," Litvaks, Jews' life in he cities. In Belarus supposedly no Jewish pogroms took place. Was the Jews' life in our territories really that smooth ? How did they live?

ZŠ: The myth about Belarusians' friendliness and peacefulness has been imposed from outside. As a matter of fact the truth was different. Antisemitism was manifested every step of the way — even by educated people. One may point to many examples of friendly attitude toward Jews; yet unfriendliness was more frequent.

Good relations between the Jews and peasants, between Jews and landlords really did exist. However, this friendliness was not based on some love for the Jews, but on pragmatic calculations. They were mutually necessary for conducting successful economic activities — for mutual survival.

The Jewish pogroms always took plce in Belarus as well. In 1881, when , after the murder of tsar Alexander II, Russia experienced a wave of pogroms, Belarusians, while not killing Jews, harmed them quietly, the Belarusian way: by setting fires to their homes. Then whole city quarters, whole towns were burning. The Jews of Belarus were not saved by Belarusians' tolerance, but rather by their fear of authorities and the mass poverty of the Jewish families. There was nothing especially to rob.

True. in the beginning of the 20th century there was; there were robberies and murders. The more prosperous-Belarusians were instigating them. They saw Jews as competitors. The Jews in Belarus may have lived a little more peacefully than in Ukraine; however the tsarist oppression was the same everywhere. There were more rich Jews in Ukraine, and more beggars in Belarus. This was one of the-main causes of pogroms in Ukraine and southern Russia in 1905.

VK: Were there serious differences exist between the life of Jews in Belarus' territory before the October revolution and after it ? How did their life change in the Soviet Union?

ZŠ: The last Russian tsar Nicholas II was a terrible antisemite. Nevertheless, after the revolution of 1905-1907, in times of the post-revolution economic boom, the Jews in Russia lived incomparably better than in the Soviet Union. The February 1905 bourgeois revolution liquidated the discrimination of Jews and opened real perspectives. Yet expectations of Jewish radicals for improving the lot of their people with help of Russian bolsheviks have not materialized (?). The Soviet authorities deprived Jews of the right for private property, for confessing (?) their own religion, for their own national schools and own language. They have lost even those political freedoms gainede after the February revolution. This is why by far not all Jews have become communists, accepted Soviet authority and served it with dedication— as it sometimes seemed. Along with other peoples of theformer tsarist Russia they survived the bolshevik nationalization, russification and repressions.

VK: In one of your interviews you recounted that your former wife felt discrimination due to the "fifth paragraph" (i.e. ethnicity). What was the cause of antisemitism in the Soviet Union? In what period was it the most acute?

ZŠ: Antisemitism is a phenomenon difficult too explain rationally. There are people who blame those around them for all their own mistakes and miscalculations. And there are others who assume even the guilt of others. From the viewpoint of the first group, the Jews are guilty of everythingthing because they were everywhere, and were successful in everything — to envy of others.

As a rule, the Jews exceeded others in education and adroitness. In order to achieve their goals they know how to mobilize their forces, and to restrain themselves in many things. Weak people and losers are blaming the Jews. The strong follow their examples, challenge them in competition, and achieve much in their lives.

The problem may be traced to the state. Who's guilty? The Jews , of course. At first Stalin needed the Jewish talent and dilligence. Being locked within the borders of the Soviet Union, the Jews suffered, conformed, survived. The "Jewish pull (blat) " also saved. What could one do, when the laws were not working? One could not expect justice from the authorities.

After the war Stalin was confident in his forces, enjoyed the fame of the victor. Yet, like Hitler, he was afraid of Jews. He knew about the Jewish solidaity in their struggle against tsarism. Therefore he was preparing a huge Jewish pogrom. The post-war years with Stalin were for the Soviet Union's Jewish population the most terrible. In best case, they expected a massive resettlement to Birobidzhan.

A new wave of antisemitism arose in Breznev's times in 1967, when Israel defeated Egypt and its ally Soviet Union. The Jews responded to the state antisemitism with massive emigration. They were allowed. After the massive emigration of Jews the Soviet Union collapsed too.

VK: How is the Jewish culture presented in contemporary Belarusian cities?

ZŠ: Neither the Jews nor their culture have been preserved in our cities. The handful of Jews in the contemporary Belarus is thoroughly russified and atheistic. The young generation does not know neither Yiddish nor Ivrit, nor the Jewish traditions. Yet, at first opportunity it emigrates to Israel, primarily due to pragmatic thinking.

And after the Jews there remained ruined synagogues, neglected cemeteries, and dust-covered files of newspapers, magazines and books in Yiddish, stored in depositories of the country's central libraries. We don't even have a state museum of history and culture of Belarus' Jews. The private museum, created by Ina Hierasimava, occupies two small rooms, if I am not mistaken. And the Jewish cultural and charitable institutions are serving primarily retirees. With the contemporary authority the inhabitants of Belarus will soon meet only tourist Jews.

VK: Is your move to Israel your final decision? Are you still ready to return to Belarus?

ZŠ: Serious people undertake serious decisions, and do not flip-flop. When I left Belarus, I understood it would be for a long time. Changes won't come to Belarus soon. Who knows how long the Russian oil will last. In times of democracy — and I am sure they will come — I will be a pretty old man for my return to be of significance for the Fatherland. Therefore, while I am still able, I will work here for the benefit of Israel and Belarus. In an interview with "Euro-radio" I said that I am ready to be Belarus' ambassador to Israel. Some young people did not understand my sense of humor, and called me an idealist. Frankly, without humor, I will be satisfied with the status of Belarusian people's emissary to Israel.

***Zachar Šybieka** was born on July 30, 1948. He has been working as the director of the National Museum of Belarus' history and culture. He occupied the post of professor of the Belarusian State Economic University. Zachar Šybieka **is** doctor of historical sciences. researcher of the Belarusain national movement, Belarusian cities and Belarusian Jews.*

BELARUS ABROAD

Aliena Makoŭskaja: Belarusians Living Abroad Are Strongest Advocates of Belarus And Its Culture

The Foreign Ministry of Belarus is currently elaborating the draft law "On Belarusians Living Abroad". The law would have the character of a framework and is expected to harmonize the Belarusian legislation in this field. The government authorities emphasize that the law will pursue an inclusive approach to include "all who define themselves as Belarusians, who have some links with Belarus and try to preserve these links", not imposing any dividing lines on the ground of ethnicity. It is reported that the Belarusian diplomatic missions in Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine and Poland have forwarded the concept of the draft to major Belarusian communities living in these countries who provided the Belarusian authorities with their feedback. The Belarusian state expects that the new law would contribute to the intensification and strengthening of cooperation of the ethnic kin-state with Belarusian communities world-wide and would help these communities to preserve their national and cultural identity. It is emphasized that the capacities of Belarusian diasporas, estimated as several million natives of Belarus and of over 200 Belarusian organizations world-wide, "might be used to foster economic growth, raise investments, promote foreign policy interests of Belarus and strengthen the country's sovereignty". **Aliena Makoŭskaja**, the president of the World Association of Belarusians "Baćkaŭščyna" provides her vision on the need for adopting a new law on Belarusians living abroad and on its perspectives for the Belarusian minorities and diasporas worldwide.

Aliena Makoŭskaja: "The need of adopting a law that would regulate relations of the Republic of Belarus with Belarusians living abroad has ripened a very long time ago. "Baćkaŭščyna" has been caring about this issue for over 10 years, since 2000 — when the preparation for the the Third Convention of World's Belarusians began. At that time the government program "Belarusians in the World," (1993) has practically ceased functioning; it was initially developed by the Belarusian Academy of Sciences on the eve of the First Convention. The topicality of adopting the law rests on the following fact: over three million of our compatriots reside beyond the borders of Belarus. A certain number of them has united in Belarusian diaspora organizations — with a variable degree of activeness. The time passes, and the population censes in foreign countries testify to the decreasing size of the Belarusian diaspora. The main cause is the assimilation — a natural process. However, its pace could be decreased significantly, by the Belarusian state conducting systematic work with

Belarusians abroad. First of all, a law should provide a legislative groundwork for this cooperation; it should also officially define the legal status of the Belarusian living abroad, as well as the legality of mutual relations of both sides, of mutual rights and obligations.

During all the time, when so far the Belarusian state has not considered the issue of mutual relations with Belarusians abroad a priority of its foreign policy activities, we have been losing: losing a strong human potential, and our image abroad. A great number of countries is striving to arrange proper cooperation with their diasporas. By doing it, they strengthen their presence world-wide, by creating their own image, and promoting loyalty to themselves and their cultures. Some countries are undertaking one more step forward: by creating abroad special institutes of their cultures. So far we can only dream about them.

It seems like an axiom — when there are Belarusians who, far from their historical homeland are engaged in Belarusian activities, their efforts should be supported by their state by all possible means. This support will benefit the Belarusian diaspora as well as the Republic of Belarus. Look who in the 1990s responded first to Belarus' need to restore its historical monuments, the need to help victims of the Chornobyl disaster? It was the Belarusians living abroad. Who has preserved our language and traditions during the Soviet era? — the Belarusians living abroad. Who is today the strongest advocate of Belarus and its culture? The answer is the same — the Belarusians from abroad !

Yes, the views of diaspora Belarusians on Belarus' current political order may vary... However, their feeling of belonging to the country and nation is based on considerably more thorough and global matters: on the love of the historical past, language, culture, people, the land. This doesn't have to be a one-sided process. The state should also undertake unifying measures. In their list the law represents a very important step.

Until its adoption, the issue of mutual relations with the Belarusian diaspora was within competence of certain sections of the Ministries of Culture, Education, and also of the apparatus of the Plenipotentiary on matters of religion. The cooperation has continued and is continuing specifically, and primarily in the economic direction. As far as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is concerned, the treatment of this issue to a large degree depends on the activeness, personal initiative and competency of Belarusian ambassadors in the given foreign country. In some countries ambassadors organize cooperation and actively communicate with Belarusian organizations. In other countries they perform observing and controlling functions, due to which some local Belarusians are simply distancing themseves from this attention. Such an attitude has negative consequences. Today it is complicated to determine how many Belarusians live beyond Belarus' borders. Some of them , taking advantage of non-existent boundary with Russia, are simply working there, while retaining their Belarusian citizenship. Others, mostly Belarusians living in the so-called "far abroad", have two passports, in order to avoid losing their original citizenship — considering the complexity of this process.

Adopting the law will create an official foundation of systemic mutual relations, that will enable any diaspora Belarusian to appeal to it. It is especially important that this law becomes filled with concrete content and become a law of direct effect.

"Baćkaŭščyna" directed many of its proposals - formulated on Conventions of World's Belarusians - to Belarus' state organs. Being a member of the working group on elaboration of the bill, we have also translated into Belarusian and analyzed legislatures of other unitary countries in the area of cooperation with diasporas.

Vjačeslavs Telešs: " We have always Supported Independent Latvia"

Whenever we talk about Belarusian minorities in European Union countries bordering Belarus, we refer to Belarusians in Poland or Lithuania. However, according to official statistics, the greatest number of ethnic Belarusians resides in Latvia; due to various reasons they remain less noticeable. The situation of Belarusians in Latvia is recounted by ***Vjačeslavs Telešs (Viačka Cielieš)****, chairman of the "Union of Belarusian artists of the Baltic Region 'Maju honar' (I have the honor)":*



The_PointJournal/Belarusian Review: *How many Belarusians live in Latvia; what are the specific features of this ethnic community?*

Vjačeslavs Telešs (Viačka Cielieš) : At the end of the Soviet rule about 120,000 Belarusians lived in Latvia. Since then, due to various reasons, the number of Belarusians residing in Latvia, has decreased. Today's figures show approximately 70,000 Latvian Belarusians. Most of them live in the capital city of Riga, as well as in Latgale — in Daugavpils (Belarusian: *Dzvinsk*) and its vicinity. In the tsarist era Latgale was a part of the Viciebsk gubernia; now its territory belongs to the Latvian national state. Belarusians here are not recognized as an autochtonous minority. Neither are the local Russians and Poles who are numerous here and who have been gradually transformed from local Belarusians into Russians, Poles or Latvians.

There is a number of Belarusian organizations active in Latvia. The first Belarusian organization in Latvia was the Latvian Society of Belarusian Culture *Śvitanak* (Dawn)"; it will mark its 25th annoversary in the fall of 2013. I was one of its founders. With time the Belarusians in Latvia have been losing their unity. Our *Śvitanak* was not able to take trips to Daugavpils or Ludza (Belarusian: *Liucyn*) to help the local Belarusians. Unfortunately, this was taken advantage by certain pro-Soviet individuals, who have opposed Latvian independence from the first day. They do support the Belarusian culture and language, yet do not have any contacts with us — since we are in favor of policies of the Latvian European state, and do not look toward the East. This is why Belarusians in Latvia are divided, like in many other places.

T_P/BR: *What opportunities are provided by the Latvian state for the developmnt of national minorities and their cultures?*

VT: Since the first day of gaining independence in 1991, the Latvian state offered all ethnic communities the possibility to revive their culture, and possess rights for the national cultural autonomy. Since then our activity has been focused on the preservation of Belarusian culture and national identity in Latvia. The state is helping us, yet everything depends on ourselves. At the same time, I do not feel any oppression of national minorities' rights, including that of language . If a person respects the people, history and culture of the country to which he came, and also knows the Latvian language, he will perceive no discomfort, when living in the Latvian society.

Since the times of Guntis Ulmanis I myself have been a member of the Minorities' Consulting Council at the Latvian presidency, representing the organization *Śvitanak* . In this council we are solving issues concerning the national minorities, including that of Latvia's Belarusians. For example, each national minority has a half-hour program on the state radio in its native language. Due to the financial crisis, there arose danger of shutting down these programs in a number of languages, including that in Belarusian. However, we succeeded in preserving the program, just like we managed to save the Belarusian school, threatened by possible closure due to the small number of students.

T_P/BR: *We usually hear that the Latvian society is divided — into Latvians and the so-called "Russian-speakers," which automatically includes also Belarusians. How do Latvia's Belarusians manage to preserve their identity and remain Belarusians, without becoming a part of the "Russian-speaking" community ?*

VT: As I said before, a person who knows the Latvian language, does not feel any discomfort in Latvia. The country's government pursues a consequent policy directed to the goal of national minorities knowing the country's official language , and, along with Latvians, working for the benefit of the Latvian state.

Those who regard the official language with contempt, comprise a multiethnic mass, with the unofficial "ethnicity" of Russian-speakers *(* Latvian*: krievvalodogie.)* Many of them are not Latvian citizens, since obtaining citizenship depends on the knowledge of Latvian, the Constitution, and the country's national anthem. Unfortunately , the situation of the "Russian-speakers" is being used by certain public figures for attaining their own political goals. One could recall the recent attempt to make Russian Latvia's second official language by means of the scandalous referendum.

Belarusians don't have to worry about the danger of assimilation; here everything depends on each family. Education in Latvian language in schools and universities opens each person additional possibilities to realize him(her)-self in the Latvian society. It is important, however, that parents teach their children Belarusian and preserve their national traditions and culture in the family. Then their children will remain Belarusians.

Interview conducted by Kiryl Kaścian .

Culture & History

Belarusian History a`la BelTA: Or a Few Words about the Lack of National Self-respect

By Kiryl Kaścian

While preparing materials for the *Belarusian Review,* I am regularly following English-language news about Belarus from various news agencies, including , the official Belarusian news agency BelTA, which claims to be the "national source of news."

In preparing this year's spring issue I have found a news item about unveiling of a memorial plaque in Riga, honoring Janka Kupala. The text contained the following phrase: "... the founder and first head of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Mindaugas". I am purposely referring to Mindouh's name in the Lithuanian version to avoid altering the sense of the English-language news item.

This treatment of information by the national news agency urged me to perform a detailed search on the BelTA site in order to determine whether this Lithuanization of names represents a solitary case or the common practice. The scheme of this search was simple — the search on the English-language version of the site has shown the names of Lithuanian Grand Dukes from Mindouh to Vitaut in various written forms. From determined coincidences I have eliminated occurrences not having to do with the Grand Dukes , as well as institutions or works named in their honor (for instance ballet "Duke Vitaut", or the Vitaut the Great University in Kaunas). The following table provides a list of determined results; whenever a certain type of search came up with a zero result — for instance Mindouh or Mendog — it is simply ignored.

Search results

Mindouh: Mindaugas -3 (Lithuanian), Mindovg - 1 (Russian)

Hiedymin: Gediminas - 3 (Lithuanian)

Alhierd: Olgerd - 1 (Russian)

Vitaut: Vytautas - 7 (Lithuanian), Vitovt -5 (Russian)

Jahajla: Jagiello - 6 (Polish), Jogaila -1 (Lithuanian), Jagila - 1 (formally Belarusian)

This type of statistics may appear not representative; however, it allows to reach a number of conclusions.

First: the Belarusian national news agency lacks a single normative approach defining the written version of the names of key personages of the Belarusian History.

Second: It seems that this choice depends on the translator or editor, and usually raises additional questions concerning the knowledge of these people in history, and their using some standardized approac in this matter. For instance, in the news item about the festivity in the Kreva castle in August of 2011, the three generations of the grand-ducal family — Hiedymin, Alhierd and Jahajla, are referred to as Gediminas, Olgerd and Jagaila — which creates the impression of them belonging to three different ethnicities. In an analogous fashion, in the news item about the anniversary of a church in Synkavičy, cousins Vitaŭt and Jahajla appear as representatives of different ethnic groups.

Third: a question arises whether these historical personages are representatives of the Belarusian history, since from all versions listed in the table only one form of writing the Grand Dukes' names may be considered Belarusian, even though only formally. When taking into account the total number of mentioning the historical personages, then in exactly half of cases (14 out of 28) they are given in Lithuanian versions. Formally such a number may indicate that in BelTA's eyes the Grand Dukes appear as an ethnically foreign element, ruling the Belarusian lands at that time.

Of course, one might say that in the version of history that is generally accepted in the English-speaking world it is traditional and established to refer to the Lithuanian Grand Dukes in Lithuanian versions — Mindaugas, Gediminas, Algirdas, Vytautas, Jogaila etc. However, these "standards" are not something inalterable; in the given case they are not supported by any references to historically original sources. They are based on the attempt to view retro-actively the past society from the perspective of contemporary nations and their national myths. The resulting attempt of some historians to adjust to this fashion creates such personages as: Dmitry Karijotaitis, Vladimir Algirdaitis, Anastasia Karijotaite, Voin Pukuveraitis or Agrafena Algirdaite (viz Rowell, S.C., *Lithuania Ascending: A Pagan Empire within East-Central Europe, 1295 - 1345,* Cambridge University Press, 1994) . It suffices to state, that in these written versions these personages are unknown to historical sources. These versions, chosen by historians, represent a historical nonsense.

Thus, nothing prevents the Belarusian governmental agency in its products addressed to foreigners to present the names of outstanding personages of Belarusian history in a manner corresponding to the Belarusian view of history. As a matter of fact, it is difficult to imagine that in the English-language version of the Lithuanian news agency ELTA web-site the names of Grand Dukes Vitaŭt or Hiedymin could be written any other way than Vytautas or Gediminas.

On the other hand, in Belarus the time has come to introduce order in writing the famous names of our pre-Russian history in English-language texts in correspondence with the Belarusian version of history, or, at least with that promoted by the official Belarusian state. Therefore, the absence of a norm-setting version of writing names of Lithuanian Grand Dukes on the web-site of the Belarusian official state-run news agency, as well as the way of presenting the names of these outstanding historical personages raise the question: interests of what state are being presented by this agency?

On the Current "West-Russian" Ideology In Belarus

By Andrzej Tichomirow

Since the middle of 90s of the past century the "Renewal" of the West-Russian historiographic school and ideological trend in Belarus became a specific phenomenon in "our " part of Europe. Similar "hybrid" ideologies, characteristic for peoples of Eastern and Central Europe in most cases ceased to exist or were fully transformed at the end of the 19th, or already in the 20th century.

Main elements of this type of ideas were based on the preservation of "regional" peculiarities of a nationality (or ethnic community) that lost or never had its own statehood — with the simultaneous recognition of the dominant position of an ethnic group more significant in an existing state (as a rule, an empire), which, after some time became a state-building nation. Additional moments of such ideological trends were: considerable interest in social issues (which served to widen its base among the rural majority), strengthening of one religious confession (usually dominant in the state), and wider usage of the state official language.

Obviously, each of this type of ideologies had its own specific character - often even very significant. Various authors of such a trend intermittently treated the same issue very differently, wrote on different topics, yet kept to a certain conformity of their own positions; they did it in a sufficiently defined form, characteristic for the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries.

Among Central and Eastern European ideological and political trends similar to the "West-Rus'ism" the researchers list "Moscow-philia" and "Russophilia" in Galicia, "Little-Rus'ism" in Ukrainian lands of the Russian empire, specific forms of "Russophilia" among Latvians and Estonians. Notable is also the phenomenon of "Bohemism" in Czech

lands, characteristic for the first half of the 19th century; it manifested itself in recognition of distinct " Lands of Saint Wenceslas' crown" with preserved balance between Czech and German communities and a clear dominance of German culture.

The first World War, series of revolutions and collapses of empires have practically buried the "hybrid" ideologies. A significant portion of "non-state" peoples obtained or renewed their statehood; there was no need anymore in preserving loyalty to former empires. The "West-Rus'ism" was sufficiently crossed out from the social consciousness by communist authorities in Belarus. However, paradoxically, in 30-40s of the 20th century, a portion of its ideological elements organically blended in the new interpretation of Belarus' history. These elements primarily consisted of the thesis of age-old unity of three Eastern Slavic peoples (Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians) and the confrontation with the "West" (primarily personified by Poland, Germany and the Roman Catholic church). The names of most "West-Russian " authors were not mentioned in the scholarly literature (and very seldom in the professional historiographic research). However, the matrix of their texts very clearly permeated works published in Soviet times.

The renewal of Belarus' independence in 1990 -1991 triggered considerable interest in history and the "return" of entire periods of the past to the scholarly discourse and the wider consciousness. The national view of history predictably assumed an important place for a considerable portion of intelligentsia; it was also supported by the state. However, along with the need for an ideological evaluation of the foreign policy and integration with Russia, for some historians and philosophers the "West-Rus'ism" became one of main sources not only for their own idelogical reflections, but also a part of self-perception.

For most of the nationally oriented part of the Belarusian society the "West-Rus'ism" presents a very negative and unacceptable phenomenon. Approximately the last 15 years are marked not only by the "renewal" of the "West-Russian" rhetorics in the media, but also by the gradual domination of this type of thinking. The "West-Rus'ism"of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, that was partially supported by the state (but also competing with other models) was considerable more "attentive" to "regional" specifics, has not demanded complete Russification of rural population, and has preserved very clear social orientation, often suspected of connection with the contemporary communist ideology.

For that portion of today's intelligentsia that chose the "West-Rus'ism" as an ideological reference point, an important factor was also the search for its own self-identification, lost after the break-up of communist ideology. Another path to it led through the return to Orthodoxy (although not always); for some members of intelligentsia the religious component represents only a part of cultural markers , characteristic for the "Russian civilization."

The current "West-Russianism" in Belarus is even more radical than its ideological forerunner. First of all, it completely rejects the use of Belarusian language in the country's public space. For most of these authors it is either completely unacceptable — or they agree with its existence only in very limited spheres. Any widening of its use almost immediately elicits a sharp reaction on the Internet (for instance in the case with the Romanization of Belarusian geographic names adopted at the UN level, and implemented as signs in the Minsk metro, or statements that road signs of localities should be also in Russian), accompanied by arguments about violations of rights or "discrimination" of the Russian language. The same authors consider themselves great "experts" of Belarusian language (while stressing that they don't use it and it isn't their native tongue), and publicly speak or write on topics they know little about.

One might define two opposite poles: one group declares that only Russian is Belarusians' native tongue, and should be the only official language[i] ,while the other says — that the contemporary Belarusian literary language is artificial and should be naturally replaced by the codified "trasianka" (specifically Belarusian form of Belarusian-Russian diglossia)[ii] In addition to arguments about the "undeveloped, non-demanded, non-prestigious" nature of the Belarusian language , these authors are also using the more "anti-westernization" component about the influence of the Polish language on formation of the Belarusian literary language. For the "West-Russian" ideology Poland and Polish culture are traditionally the most dangerous rivals; argument of this type should be also effective in creating a negative attitude toward the Belarusian language. The dissemination of "West-Russian" ideology by means of Internet, aided by various special resources (mainly Russian) also shows the attitude toward the Belarusian language. The Web-site "Zapadnaya Rus" declares clearly that it accepts users' comments only in Russian; frequently attempts to use Belarusian in comments were accompanied by corresponding comments by the web-site's administrator, threatening the user with banning the use of site. At the same time using Belarusian words in a negative or mocking context in most texts does not elicit any reaction; actually, it is welcomed.

A very significant differentiation from other forms of "pro-Russian" ideological trends may be found in dealing with history of the 19th century in the current "West-Russian" discourse. While during the Soviet period left-oriented political and national movements (practically independent of ethnicity) in scholarly and popular literature were in principle evaluated positively, for today's **adepts** of Mikhail Koyalovich the treatment of the Russian empire period is completely different. The jubilee year 2013, dedicated to the 150th anniversary of the 1863-1864 uprising in Belarus, Lithuania, and Poland (or better known to the wider Belarusian society as "Kastuś Kalinoŭski's uprising") is characterized by an entire discussion on evaluation of the uprising and spreading the opinion about its "anti-Belarusian" character. The "scholarly and eductional project Zapadnaya Rus" conducted a special conference where the uprising was treated according to logic of Russian historiography and popular readings at the nd of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries: from calling the uprising exclusively Polish to denying Kastuś Kalinoŭski a place in the Belarusian national memory.

The discussions around the uprising and its leader in Belarusian-Lithuanian lands elicited also a number of problems of a methodological nature: most current ″West-Rus'ians″ were educated in Soviet times, and, despite their attempts to abandon not only the scholarly style specific to that time, but also the treatment of events, they remain with ideological indicators, elaborated in the spirit of Karl Marx and Auguste Comte (positivism in describing history had a very strong influence on the Soviet historiography). An exception remains in the very mechanical and unevaluated use of western (primarily Anglo-American) models of describing nation-building in the 19-20th centuries, where primarily a constructivist view of nations is applied. Briefly, such theses may be presented this way: The Russian nation (or German, sometimes Polish) are treated in the primordialist way (as age-old and unalterable), and the ″rural″nations of Eastern and Central Europe — Belarusians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians — in the constructivist one (as artificial and invented). Absence in western scholarly discussions in over 50 years led not only to a crisis of the Belarusian humanitarian knowledge, but also to difficulties in mastering western theories after such a scholarly exchange (mainly in a one-sided form) became possible. The utilization of the sufficiently rich and ideologically unequivocal ″West-Russian″ scholarly and literary legacy of the 19-20th centuries by current advocates of this trend is fairly mechanical and uncritical. The ″Exit″ from the contemporary scholarly style is also fairly infrequent; when it occurs, it has all the features of the typical Soviet ″newsspeak,″ or of the very specific style, characteristic for the Russian politology.

Despite the fairly limited circle of authors and advocates of the ″West-Russian″ idea, their activeness is disturbing nationally-oriented authors and observers. Such a reaction is understandable due to a number of causes: the spread of the ″neo-West-Russ'ism″ is very visible in education, media , and influence on the civic opinion; it is also reflected in Belarus' image abroad, and thus becomes an ideological challenge to the nationally conscious part of society. Additionally, the issue of broadening and strengthening the use of Belarusian language in the public space remains one of important issues for the society. Voices opposing it become stronger, being aided by the ″West-Rus'ism″ and argumentation appealing to human rights and discrimination. The latter moment is very interesting and characteristic for the Russian view on neighboring countries: while basic ideological pillars of Western democracy are being rejected, an argument taken precisely from the ″westernization″ matrix is being used in the ″media wars″ with countries like Latvia and Estonia.

The ″revival″ of the ″West-Rus'ism″ in Belarus, with its similarity to ″pro-Russian″ movements in neighboring countries (most visible in Ukraine) may be considered a certain paradox. In its ″pure″ form the ″hybrid″ consciousness of this type actually experienced a renewal only in Belarus; additionally it received support of some state structures or the Orthodox church. Why was this ″revival″ possible ? Most likely the ″explosion″ of interest in history led also to the renewal of ″West-Rus'ism″, as a ″forgotten″ or ″half-forbidden″ idea, known by few, and described and expresssed by few. An additional factor may be the flowering of radical nationalism in Russia, and the intensive religious life from the end of 1980s to the beginning of 1990s. At a certain moment using the ″West-Russian″ matrix became advantageous in the political struggle , and, additionally in foreign policy rhetoric.

The current ″West-Rus'ism″ in Belarus, despite its relatively limited scope represents a part of ideological support for the country's dependence from its eastern neighbor. It also elicits the need for the scholarly and popular mastering of the country's legacy not only from the ″West-Russian″ positions, but also from other sides, by using the latest methodological approaches. Most interesting may be the research of the influence of this type of consciousness on the masses, or the analysis of discoursive practices in texts or public appearances.

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i. http://www.ruska-pravda.com/2008-05-08-14-25-53/39-st-alternativa/19844-2013-01-30-03-54-50

ii. http://nn.by/?c=ar&i=72218

ECONOMY

Belarus' atomic future

By David Marples

In a few days, the world will commemorate the 27th anniversary of the nuclear disaster at the Chernobyl station in Ukraine.

After some frenetic negotiations, principally between Ukraine and the IAEA, the plant shut down permanently in the year 2000. Belarus suffered disproportionately from the radiation fallout. About 80% of the republic received high levels of radioactive iodine, and about a fifth of the country—mostly the southern regions of Homiel and Mahileu—were contaminated with cesium and strontium, with half-lives of approximately three decades.

Since the disaster, April 26 has been commemorated more by the opposition than the authorities. The Chernobyl Way march might have lost some significance over the years. Moreover, the government has been practically triumphant about its success in "overcoming the consequences of the disaster." The president has frequently visited the contaminated areas on Chernobyl anniversaries, stressing that the affected lands are now suitable for cultivating crops. In reality many families in the rural regions (well known for the production of flax) have been living off the land since the accident occurred.

This year the Chernobyl march will take on enhanced significance given that construction work has started on Belarus' own nuclear plant on the border with Lithuania at Astraviec, in Hrodna region. Belarus has been assuring the Lithuanians that they have no cause for concern, that attention has been paid to environmental concerns, and that the plant has modern technology that was applied to the Fukushina station after the accident caused by the tsunami in March 2011. After the Japanese disaster, Belarus offered its aid, augmented by the many years of experience with dealing with Chernobyl.

The republic was not part of the original Soviet nuclear program. The only initiative was a half-finished nuclear power and heating station toward the end of the Soviet period that fell victim to the wave of anti-nuclear protests in the late 1980s, along with many other projects. After Fukushima, as after Chernobyl, several states began to question their commitment to nuclear energy. Germany abandoned it entirely. Russia by contrast started anew, with ambitious export-oriented programs that include the construction of a new "Baltic" station in the Kaliningrad region.

The Belarus project has begun as an almost exclusively Russian development. Russia will provide funding, technology, fuel, and most of the plant's engineers. The AES-2006 design is also being used to construct the latest version of the Leningrad station (originally the first graphite-moderated RBMK model in the USSR) as well as the Baltic plant. The reactor-pressure vessels and other components for the Belarus plant are being manufactured in Volgodonsk by Russia's Atomenergomash. In addition to Belarus, the other example of the design being deployed at Astraviec is the nuclear power station in Taiwan.

In theory, the construction of the station will allow Belarus to offset some of its energy dependence on Russia once it comes on line around 2017 and 2018—the second reactor is expected to be in service by 2020. Yet there are several causes for serious concern, in addition to the obvious ones of cost overruns and the issue of Belarus falling even deeper into debt to Russia for its construction.

The first is the new build-up of nuclear reactors in a constricted region. In addition to the Baltic and Belarusian stations, new nuclear plants are at the planning stage in Lithuania (a successor to the Ignalina station, an RBMK-1500 building on the Belarusian border), and Poland. Not since the late 1970s has there been such a build-up of nuclear stations in central Europe. And Belarus is at the epicenter of the nuclear energy revival.

The second is an obvious but understated question of late. Are the consequences of Chernobyl really behind us? Can we safely say that there will be no more medical victims, or people affected by the accident?

In a scientific paper presented—perhaps ironically given what was to follow in that country—in Nagasaki, Japan, Pavel Bespalchuk of the Belarusian State Medicial University Yuri E. Demidchik of the Minsk Thyroid Center, and seven other scholars noted that there were more than 12,000 cases of thyroid gland cancer in Belarus during the first twenty years after Chernobyl. Initially prevalent among children, which linked the disease directly to the nuclear accident, its most recent manifestation is in the age group of 46 and older, where malignant cancers have had an impact in five of the six regions of Belarus. The paper suggests that the issue of thyroid cancer among "Chernobyl children" is over, but the disease is now presenting a problem among an older age group.

Perhaps of even more immediate concern for Belarusians are the precautions being taken for a major accident. We saw at both Chernobyl and Fukushima that evacuations actually worsened the problems by moving people to areas with even higher radiation than in their original locations. And in Belarus one has the added problem of lands still contaminated from Chernobyl. These issues should be of concern not only to those taking part in the Chernobyl Way demonstration next Friday, but also to all residents of Belarus. There have been no referendums on the issue of nuclear energy in the republic. The new station has been sanctioned with little public discussion. Comparisons with the Soviet era decision-making are only too apt.

Source: Charter 97 org, April 24, 2013

Russia is not Threatening Belarus' Independence, but rather is Limiting its Choices

On June 7, 2013 Russia's ambassador to Belarus Alexander Surikov held a press-conference in Minsk, during which he raised a number of important issues of the Belarus-Russia relations. He confirmed that the official Minsk addressed the Kremlin asking for financial support for the modernization of Belarus' industrial complex. According to Surikov, Russia is ready to provide financial support the modernization of Belarusian industrial enterprises, but only those that will be developed as the joint businesses. "We believe that we should support the modernization of those projects, which will develop as mutual businesses, which will bring improvements for a Belarusian and a Russian alike. But simple 'give us modernization for a Belarusian factory to be more competitive than a Russian' – who ever gave money for producing competitors", - Surikov stated. Professor **David R. Marples** provides his vision of the perspectives for the Belarus-Russia economic cooperation.

David R. Marples: "Surikov's statement seems to be a fairly accurate rendition of Russia's official stance combining assistance to Belarus with further integration of the two economies. It is reminiscent of the statement of former Russian Finance Minister Aleksey Kudrin in 2011, when he insisted that in return for a $3 billion loan from the Eurasian Economic Community over three years, Belarus must privatize $7.5 billion worth of property. The first step in such transactions was Russia's purchase of Belatranshaz, a company in which it had previously held 50% of stock, based on an earlier agreement. That sale was also connected with the lowering of prices for gas purchased from Russia and a further loan, directly from Russia, for the construction of the nuclear power station at Astraviec, in Hrodna region.

Two factors are at play here. The first is the issue of privatization of state-owned companies in Belarus, long known as an important producer of tractors, trucks, potash, ammonium nitrate, and other products. The second is the nature of the privatization, when all sales are directed toward one specific country, i.e. the Russian Federation, rather than opened to international tender, as one might expect in a general program of privatization. In this way,

sale of companies is closely linked to tightening integration. Belarus is the country in need of loans—more or less constantly for the past few years—and to acquire them it must sell its chief assets to its neighbor.

That this situation is frustrating for the Belarusian authorities is evident. It is illustrated by the massive development of a Chinese industrial park between Minsk and the Minsk-2 International Airport at a cost of $5 billion. Though an obvious attempt to build an alternative manufacturing base, the complex is also dependent on Chinese loans, workers, and 60% ownership of the company doing the developing. But like the nuclear power plant, there will be no immediate return as the first stage is to be completed only by 2020. In the meantime, Russia can apply further pressure for sale of major companies.

The first is likely to be a "holding company" merging the MAZ factory with Russia's KamAZ in the fall. Surikov also expressed interest in purchasing some of Hrodna Azot's assets. Several more Russian purchases or mergers are in the pipeline, including especially defense industry projects, and Belaruskali, which has been subject to protracted discussions for the past few years. For Belarus the key question is whether these buy-outs for loans constitute genuine privatization or whether the takeovers are politically oriented, undertaken by companies that have close ties to the Russian government. Its current cold relations with the EU in particular reduce its choices, and the prospects of receiving a substantial second loan in the near future from the IMF appear fairly gloomy. And frankly neither the Chinese solution nor the nuclear power station offers a real exit plan for Belarus. The former requires improved relations with the EU, the obvious market for the industrial park's products; and the latter requires Russian finance, technology, and fuel. In the meantime Belarusian debts continue to increase.

Surikov's speech suggests that Russia is not threatening Belarus' independence, but rather is limiting its choices and maneuverability, and gradually controlling its main assets. The process may be slow but it seems inexorable."

China Builds EU Beachhead With a $5 Billion City in Belarus

By Aliaksandr Kudrytski

China is building an entire city in the forests near the Belarusian capital Minsk to create a manufacturing springboard between the European Union and Russia.

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka allotted an area 40 percent larger than Manhattan around Minsk's international airport for the $5 billion development, which will include enough housing to accommodate 155,000 people, according to Chinese and Belarusian officials.

Lukashenka, who's led his former Soviet state of 9.5 million for two decades, is turning to China to help revive a $60 billion economy that's needed $6.5 billion of bailouts from the International Monetary Fund and Russia since 2009. The hub will put Chinese exporters within 170 miles of EU members Poland and Lithuania and give them tax-free entry into Russia and Kazakhstan, which share a customs union. It will also let them draw from a workforce that's 99.6 percent literate and makes $560 a month on average, half the Polish wage.

"This is a unique project," Gong Jianwei, China's ambassador to Belarus, said on state television May 17, after the project won regulatory approval. "Nobody will be able to build anything like this industrial park anywhere else in Europe anymore. The infrastructure is so powerful."

The "modern city on the Eurasian continent," as it's called in marketing documents, will be built around the M1 highway that links Moscow and Berlin via Belarus and Poland. A speed-rail network will tie the airport to the center of the city, which will be powered by a $10 billion nuclear plant, Belarus's first, which Russia agreed to finance and build by 2018. The first stage of the park is scheduled to be completed by 2020, with the second stage taking another 10 years.

'Highly Advantageous'

China, which signed a $3 billion currency swap deal with Belarus in 2009 to boost trade, agreed to finance the venture with low-interest loans as long as half the money is spent on Chinese materials, technology or labor, according to Kirill Koroteev, the former Economy Ministry official tapped by Lukashenko to manage the Belarus side of the project. Koroteev is deputy head of Industrial Park Development Co., which is 60 percent owned by a unit of China National Machinery Industry Corp. and 40 percent owned by Belarus's government.

"The loan conditions are highly advantageous," Koroteev said in an interview in his office in Minsk, leaning back from a desk cluttered with documents in Russian, English and Chinese. "It doesn't make sense for us to even consider financing from other banks."

Export-Import Bank of China and China Development Bank Corp. are among Chinese lenders that have already agreed to fund the project, Liu Xuesong, councilor at the Chinese Embassy in Minsk, said by e-mail. The press office at China Development Bank in Beijing didn't respond to an e-mail request for comment and Liu Yang, a publicity officer at Export-Import Bank, didn't answer calls to his office phone.

Tax Breaks

It's not just Chinese companies that are eligible for the tax breaks at the future park. Any enterprise that pledges to invest at least $5 million and work in an "advanced sphere" such as biomedicine or electronics can receive the 10-year waiver on profit and property taxes, according to the project's website. Taxes will be halved for companies in the second 10 years after their investment.

More than 10 companies have already shown interest, including drug makers Sinopharm Group (1099), based in Hong Kong, and Latvia's Grindeks, Koroteev said. Sinopharm didn't respond to e-mailed questions and Grindeks declined to comment immediately. "We aim to turn this place into an international business springboard," Koroteev said. "We don't want to build a dead city."

Source: www. bloomberg.com, May 26, 2013

MEDIA & BOOKS

Valer Bulhakaŭ:
Today ARCHE Faces Elementary Issue of Survival

On May 22, 2013 the minister of information Aleh Praliaskouski undersigned the certificate on the state registration of the periodical "ARCHE, Pačatak." Thus, after months-long efforts, the periodical, observing this year its 15th anniversary, was granted renewal of the registration. This means that from now on there are no legal obstacles to publishing the paper version of ARCHE . Valer Bulhakaŭ, the editor-in-chief of ARCHE, comments the fact of the registration renewal for the ***Belarusian Review.***

Valier Bulhakau: The re-registration of ARCHE should not be pereceived as some outstanding event by the Belrusian media community. The periodical's total annual circulation amounts to 6-7,000 copies; it clearly cannot excite the wider Belarusian masses. It became an event, since new mass media are actually not being registered in Belarus. Even the very procedure of the registration renewal of the already existing media became absurd; for replacing one line of text with another in the registration certificate issued earlier, one needs nothing more or less than the personal consent of the minister of information.

I wish to state immediately, that there will be no return to the format of activities in the first half of 2012. Now the main issues are not broadening the readership , and increasing the quantity and quality of our editions. Now the main issue is that of elementary survival. The earlier schemes, proven during the years of existence, do not work under the new circumstnces. Our primary problem is now — where can we print the issue No.1 of 2013; the publishing companies are fleeing in terror, having heard the word ARCHE. We hope to solve this problem; within a month the fresh isue should appear.

However, a more essential problem is looming in the background. This year we have exceeded the framework of what is allowed by the current Belarusian regime. If we continue on our earlier course, the choice will be either prison or emigration. I am convinced that publishing a voluminous monthly in emigration has no sense. This is why I did not attempt to publish it during my stay in Vilnia. I am certain that our work in Belarus will have a considerably greater effect than beyond its borders.

As a result , one will have to accept the unwritten rules of existence in our currently existing media space.

When we succeed in arranging the regular printed appearance of the publication (so far there exist doubts concerning it), then we will focus not on politics, but rather on science and technology. The scholarly sciences, particularly the historiography and lexicography represent our topical priority; quality editions on topics of Belarusian language and history are being sold best.

We want to test the latest technologies by creating an e-shop, that would sell Belarusian-language electronic publications. Only 10-15 years ago this task was technically not viable; yet now similar services exist in most European countries."

Living with a Scent of Danger

Interviewing the book's author

The book *Living with a Scent of Danger: European Adventures at the Fall of Communism'* by Joanne Ivy Stankievich covers the years 1988 - 2001 when she and her husband Walter (Viachka) Stankievich lived in Munich, Prague and Florence. It was the period when the work of Walter Stankievich was related to his homeland of Belarus, including eight years as Director of the Belarus Service for Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty. Joanne introduces her book to the readers of *Belarusian Review* and shares her views on some historical milestones covered by the book.

Belarusian Review (BR):*What caused you to write the book 'Living with a Scent of Danger: European Adventures at the Fall of Communism'*?

Joanne Ivy Stankievich (JIS): The main purpose for writing the book was to help Westerners better understand the impact of Communism on individual lives. However, I find also that many older people in Eastern Europe relate to their memories of those times, or want their children to understand what they went through.

BR: *Live history embodied into memoirs is an important part of knowledge about certain events. What is particular about your book?*

JIS: Many Europeans seem intrigued with my American perspective on their experiences and countries. The book is not a research paper – though much research was done to insure the accuracy of depicting the historical events of those years. Rather, the book focuses on personal experiences and growing insights into those times, having found that humor and spiritual intuitions were needed to cope with the political, cultural and language challenges.

BR: *The book covers the period of dramatic changes in Belarus when the country got its independence. From your perspective, what did an ordinary Westerner know about Belarus then?*

JIS: Unfortunately, American background on European history and geography is slight; they often asked us, "Belarus: where is that?" But many people – having known us or read the book – say that they now follow with interest any report in the news about Belarus, like the airdrop of teddy bears with democratic messages, or about demonstrations against fraudulent elections.

BR: *What was the role and impact of the Belarus Service for Radio Free* Europe/Radio Liberty in spreading a word about Belarus in the world at that time?

JIS: We keep hearing from people in Eastern Europe how RFE/RL was "a lifeline of hope" for them under Communism, where the media were totally controlled and true events often not reported. While he radios' message was directed to the east, it served as a source of news about Belarus for the media throughout the world. Walter says his eight years as the Belarus Service Director, during such historic changes, were for him the most interesting and rewarding of his overall work experience.



Besides his work at the Radios, Walter also participated in many of the events as a member of the Belarusian community outside of the country. For instance, our taking part at the 1st Congress of Belarusians of the World in Minsk in 1993, where it became evident to me that Belarus was not yet on a firmly democratic path.

For me, those years were an exciting time of sometimes dangerous, but always fascinating experiences, greatly broadening my own American background.

BR: *What categories of people are particular target groups of your book and why?*

JIS: Certainly, Westerners who are interested in expanding their understanding of that historical period; Belarusians in Belarus and worldwide; women intrigued by how an American woman of limited language skills could find her own niche in Europe; and those who have traveled or lived in Europe.

Two reviews indicate responses to the book:

Written on amazon.com by an average American:

"I remember well President Reagan saying, 'Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall' but it is very interesting to hear how life was in and around the Soviet Union at that time. A perspective I didn't think much about at that time."

And quoted from the back cover of the book:

"This book is a living history… You are in for quite a ride. Fasten your seat belts." Alexander Lukashuk, Belarus Service Director at RFE/RL

From Chereya to Chicago - a memoir by Mikhail Mirkin

Book: Mirkin M. From Chereya to Chicago. Jerusalem, 2013. – 392 p., 278 im., 31 attach.

By Dr. Leonid Smilovitsky

For a historian who really wants to recreate the past, it is not sufficient to know and understand the past era in question, nor is it sufficient for him or her to have a fertile imagination and the skills of a storyteller – there must also be documents and eyewitness accounts. Together these will create a picture that can persuade the general reader of the authenticity of the events described, and will contribute to the comprehension of the period that has never entirely disappeared, but continues to live on in the thoughts and feelings of the children and grandchildren of those who experienced it.

Mikhail Mirkin's book is a fine example of the evolution and development that took place in his lifetime. His story seems at first to be unremarkable, relating as it does to the vicissitudes of a typical boyhood in a typical shtetl in the Vitebsk region of Byelorussia. What is remarkable is that he survived and thrived despite all of the adversities that he had to confront in his life.

How is it that he did manage to survive? Though he had to flee from the Nazis in the first weeks of the War and was evacuated from his home, he became an infantry officer on the front; was involved in intense, ferocious fighting, being severely wounded three times; learning of the death of his family at the hands of the Nazis and witnessing comrades killed in battle – he nevertheless came back to confront life each time. He eventually found his soul-mate in the recently-liberated Belorussian town of Borisov; graduated from an elite college, worked in Siberia, and then left for the United States. Was his fate somehow predetermined in heaven? Out of the hundreds of thousands of Jews who met their end in the ditches and pits that became their common graves, and those who died of starvation, illness and overwork in Soviet military plants, or those killed by bullets or torn apart by shells, mines and bombs at the front, why was Misha Mirkin not there among them?

Some might say that it was his "lucky stars" and who can argue with that? However, it is the opinion of this researcher, who has studied hundreds of lives in the course of more than thirty years as a professional historian, that the occurrences in Mr. Mirkin's life were more by design than by chance. To be convinced of this, dear reader, you will have to read this book yourself.

Not relying on his memory, the author based this book on a diary he kept during World War II (it is extremely rare for a historian to find a diary; and doubly rare for the author of the diary to be found alive). Keeping a diary as well as taking pictures was strictly forbidden (both in the Red Army and the Wehrmacht) – but Mikhail was not deterred by this, though things would certainly have ended differently had his little secret come to light. The SMERSH[1] would not have shown him any mercy had they found

out. Mikhail, both in general and on account of the Jewish values imbued in him, exhibited a deep appreciation of the importance of recorded history. This trait caused him to collect and keep a living testimony of his family's history throughout the entire course of his life. Thanks to this, we have in this work, the unique opportunity to retrace in detail the evolution of what is, in many respects, a typical Jewish family, which the Soviet authorities worked so hard to assimilate into their system. However, in the course of over seventy years of power, the Soviet regime did not achieve this objective in the case of the Mirkins, and consequently the departure of Mikhail along with his whole mishpucha to the USA seems to be naturally determined.

The book contains a number of convincing visual documents – almost three hundred very interesting photographs. The amateur photos and documents eloquently confirm the narration. Look closely at the faces portrayed here. Only people who have nothing to hide can look back at you in such a frank, ingenious and sincere way. This book comes out on the eve of the author's 90th birthday, when he is rightly considered a patriarch by the members of his family. Only a few among us manage to sum up our lives in time. Mikhail Mirkin has realized this dream. He passes on his reminiscences and reflections to his grandchildren as if passing the baton of life to them, and one cannot imagine a better gift.

Author: Dr. Leonid Smilovitsky, chief researcher, The Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University.

SPORTS

SKA Minsk Wins European Challenge Cup

SKA Minsk handball players outclassed Luxembourg's Handball Esch in the EHF Challenge Cup final second leg to pocket the EHF Challenge Cup trophy. SKA Minsk won five European titles during the club's history, yet, according to BelTA last time they lifted the European title was 23 years ago.

In the second leg of the AEHF Challenge Cup final SKA Minsk did not leave the Luxemburg side any chance beating them 32:24 (first-leg result 31:26). About 5,500 supporters watched the game at Minsk Arena. Barys Pukhouski was the best striker of the game (9 goals). He also became the Challenge Cup top scorer with 92 goals.

SKA Minsk's head coach Spartak Miranovich, 74, remarked that he has been waiting for this trophy for a long time. Though it is the third most important European handball tournament it is nevertheless a prestigious victory the whole team wanted to achieve.

On their way to the EHF Challenge Cup final SKA Minsk beat several teams including Estonia's Polva Serviti (37:32, 36:24), Italy's Pallamano Pressano (28:20, 39:25), Serbia's Radnicki Kragujevac (42:29, 43:27) and Norway's IL Runar (32:29, 33:31).

SKA Minsk got their first European tournament victory 30 years ago. Back then, the Minsk club overpowered HC Dinamo from Romania's capital Bucharest. In the halftime of the 25 May final handball stars of the 1980s and 1990s appeared on the parquet of Minsk Arena.

Last time SKA Minsk played in the finals of continental tournaments in 1992. Back then, the EHF Cup final saw the German SG Wallau beating the Belarusian team. In the times of the Soviet Union SKA Minsk clinched the European Champions Cup three times (1987, 1989, 1990) and won the Cup Winners' Cup twice (1983, 1988). SKA Minsk took part in European tournaments on 29 occasions.

In April SKA Minsk won the current season's Baltic Handball League.

Source: *BelTA, May 27, 2013*

Belarusian Language Banned in The Kontinental Hockey League

By Kiryl Kascian

On May 29, 2013 Pressball, the biggest Belarusian sport newspaper, informed that according to Ivan Karaichau, a spokesman for HC Dynama Minsk, the club tried to obtain permission from the league's authorities to transcribe the players' names on their shirts either in the Belarusian language or in the Latin transliteration from Belarusian ("Kulakov — Kulakou"). However, the board of the Kontinental Hockey League turned down both options, according to Pressball .. As Belarusian media reported earlier, Dynama tried to obtain permission to write the players' names in the Belarusian language back in 2011.

However, this initiative was rejected by the KHL board

In Vol. 23, No. 3 (2011) the *Belarusian Review* analyzed the KHL rules on transliteration. These rules are reportedly based on the so-called "practical transcription"; foreign names are transliterated according to the historically vested orthographic system of the Russian language, often in a different form than in the official documents. The regulations distinguish between the Latin- and Cyrillic-based languages and apply different practices concerning each group of languages in the case of writing relevant personal names in the KHL documents in Latin letters. Hence, names derived from the languages primarily using the Latin alphabet (Latvian, Finnish, Czech, etc.) are rendered in their original form, with the ommission of possible diacritics - whereas the Cyrillic-based languages (Belarusian, Ukrainian, and Kazakh) are openly considered as subjects of Russification. The same approach applies to the usage of personal names in the Russian language: while the Latin-based languages imply a thorough transliteration to Russian language thoroughly; with writing personal names exactly - including possible diacritics, the Cyrillic-based languages are simply treated as subjects of Russification.

should be confronted by the Belarusian society on a wider scale. Moreover, a logical question might be raised: should the above mentioned double standards of the KHL officials concerning the Belarusian language be tolerated? Their action might be regarded as an attempt to impose the Russian cultural domination in the post-Soviet area, resulting in Belarusian being treated as a second-class language at the most on the territory of the Republic of Belarus.

HISTORICAL DATES

.April 11, 1995

Hunger Strike by 19 Belarusian Parliament Members

(day of historical significance)

This hunger strike was "part of protests against President Lukashenko's initiative to hold a national referendum calling for economic integration with Russia, the elevation of Russian to the level of a state language, the introduction of a Soviet-style state symbols to replace the historical ones and the right of the president to dismiss Parliament. The hunger strikers felt that some of the referendum questions, if approved, would be in violation of the Constitution."

"On the night of April 11, special forces beat the striking lawmakers and dragged them into the street, injuring 7 people. The Procurator General's Office launched a criminal investigation into the incident, but dropped it later under pressure from the president's administration, and no one was ever charged nor punished for the beatings of the parliamentarians.

The following day, under prodding from the president and with the opposition physically disabled and absent, the Supreme Soviet agreed to include all the four questions in the referendum and hold it on May 14 along with parliamentary elections. In the referendum, President Lukashenko's proposals were approved by some 80 percent of those who took part. The official explanation for dropping the investigation was the failure to establish those who had beaten the parliamentarians and circumstances of the incident."

June 14, 1900

Birthdate of **Michas Zabejda-Sumicki,** a famous Belarusian opera singer. Lived and performed in Kharbin (China), Milan, Warsaw, Prague.

June 19, 1924

Birthdate of **Vasil Bykau,** an outstanding Belarusian writer and public figure. Most of his works covered the topic of World War Two, experienced by him as a soldier.

Towards the end of his life he was forced to seek refuge abroad. He lived in Finland, Germany and the Czech Republic. He was forced out of his homeland due to attacks in the state-run press and censorship of his writings. The regime continues to take revenge against Bykau even after his death. Vasil Bykau's books are not being republished in Belarus and films about his life and creative work are banned.

Bykau was considered for the Nobel prize in literature in late 1990. He died on June 22, 2003.

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